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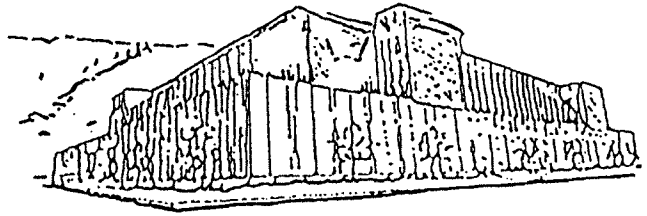
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Redefining Masculinity: The Promise Keeper Movement in Montana

by

Staci V. Richards

B.A. University of Washington, 1995

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

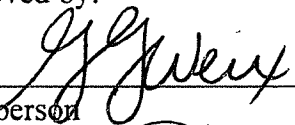
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Master of Arts


The University of Montana

1999

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Richards, Staci V., M.A., April 1999

Anthropology

Redefining Masculinity: The Promise Keeper Movement in Montana. (83pp.)

Chair: Dr. Gretchen Weix 

Promise Keepers, an evangelical Christian men's movement, has affected the lives of many families in the United States. This research is a study of masculinity carried out via Promise Keepers men's voices through the life history method and participant observation. This research compares Promise Keeper gender roles to existing parameters for gender roles in American culture. The Promise Keepers challenge a traditional model of masculinity. This movement addresses fatherhood responsibilities, family relationships, and connecting with other human beings; specifically men, on an intimate level through literature, stadium rallies and men's 'accountability' groups.

The life history method establishes a relationship between the researcher and subject by allowing for discussion, clarification and interjection during the interviews. The interviews included discussion about PK men's childhood, their relationship to their faith, their marriage and children, and how they ended up becoming part of the Promise Keeper movement. Our discussions brought up several themes including : intimate friendships, "servant leader" and "servant helper" marriage relationships, and strong, committed family relationships. The interviews were supplemented with participant observation in the men's homes and at their congregations. Analysis of my participation with the Promise Keeper men and their families as well as our interviews offer an alternative definition of masculinity in the conclusions of this research. This alternative definition of masculinity is negotiated through gender to encourage PK members to become "godly influences" in their world.

INTRODUCTION

As we come to the end of the twentieth century, families in America are in transition. They are no longer expected to fit into an archetypal “nuclear” mold of the post WWII era, a “modern” family, with the female engineering the family “inside” the home and the male working outside the home supporting the family financially.¹ Current “post modern” family trends force men and women to work outside the home, relying on extended kin and daycare for childcare and support. Single as well as dual parent households take on all socially prescribed gender roles relying on extended familial groups for support. In “post modern” families, one family member may choose to work from home with a fax and computer while simultaneously caring for the children. More and more families are adapting to a more egalitarian form of housework, resource allocation and child care. Judith Stacey, an Anthropologist and prominent scholar on families explains “post modern” families in her book *Brave New Families: Stories of domestic upheaval in late twentieth century America*. In the following text, Stacey explains how Americans struggle to build successful “post modern” families.

...they have drawn on a diverse,, often incongruous array of cultural, political, economic and ideological resources, fashioning these resources into new gender and kinship strategies to cope with post industrial challenges, burdens and opportunities. ²

American history has produced three outstanding ideals of family. During colonial times, the “Godly family, the pre-industrial unit which consists of men and women working at home in separate capacities, with authoritarian rule by the male head

¹Stacey 1990:10

²Stacey 1990:16

of the household creating a independent “...economic, social and political unit...”.³ Gender responsibilities and roles were an economic necessity placing the male as overseer of all production inside and outside the home.⁴ Social control was sanctioned through gender roles and the church. The onset of the Industrial revolution brought on changes in families and in the roles of women and men. Men began to work outside the home for economic stability, supplemented by the work women took outside of their domestic management. Families strove for an economic ideal, defining a “modern” family which placed the man as the sole financial supporter creating greater financial dependence for women who managed their households. In the fifties era, a “modern” family grudgingly took a back seat to the present “post modern” families who are made up of a diverse combinations of kin. Today, “post modern” families are not fitting into any one model of what is normal or even ideal.

Ideas surrounding families in America are changing as the complex dynamics of these relationships are discussed by prominent scholars. Janet Finn, a professor of Social Work, explores social work practice knowledge in her article ‘Gender and Families’, hoping to use this discussion to better serve families who are involved in social service. She delves into the changing standards and expectations of families beginning with the assumption that “...gender and family are social constructions”. If we consider this as a foundation to study these blended concepts, we are then able to “... develop a more complicated vision of family that better reflects the diverse ways in which people imagine and craft family ties.”⁵ By exploring gender in families, specifically masculinity, we can begin to understand the implications of a religious revitalization movement like the Promise Keepers on American families.

³Stacey 1990: 7

⁴ ibid.

⁵ Finn 1998:205

Promise Keepers, an evangelical Christian men's movement, has affected the lives of many families in the United States. This movement began as a small Christian outreach to men and has evolved into a social phenomena claiming one million members in attendance at "Stand in the Gap", a gathering in Washington DC. This thesis is about Promise Keepers men; the people who attend the conferences, join accountability groups and use PK literature and resources. I am a feminist looking to expand my knowledge about Christian revitalization movements and masculinity, topics that are subordinate in feminist literature. I chose the Promise Keepers in Montana for my thesis topic after viewing CNN coverage of a conference in Washington DC, the life ways of these men were interesting and worth researching through fieldwork and background literature.

All families are in transition, however Stacy believes, the "post modern" family is even more so because it has less rigid boundaries and a counter movement at its heels desiring a turn back to "modern" family times. The PK movement is itself an attempt to create a new type of family "... from the ashes and the residue of the modern family".⁶ PK is a revitalization movement which focuses on men and their place in the family affecting all the other roles in their families. Through specific gender definitions and opportunities, PK has affected what it means to be a man thus changing what it means to be a woman in evangelical families.

Promise Keeper leadership, prompted by this trend of transition in American families, began a movement to solidify men's place in present day Christian households and outside communities. Promise Keeper families are not necessarily defined as a "modern family", corresponding with what is generally described as evangelical Christian families. They are committed to a combination of some "modern" family characteristics such as abdicating decision making to the male "servant leader"⁷ and some "post

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ This term is discussed in detail in chapter three, 'Men's Voices'.

modern” family characteristics like dual child care responsibilities. Promise Keepers leadership promotes a complicated combination of characteristics to define a family relying heavily on what it means to be a man in the family unit thus defining subsequent family roles by this given set of standards. Anthropologically, family is defined as “...a locus not of residence but of meaning and relationships.”⁸ Promise Keepers definition of family is comprised of a “modern family” ideal and some “post modern” characteristics for the men and other people involved in their lives.

Today, American families are comprised of arrangements which Judith Stacey describes as “..diverse, fluid, and unresolved.”⁹ She goes on to explain that this is because another family structure has not become common enough to succeed the “modern” family. Promise Keeper men are involved in a movement which takes a proactive approach to redefining family and relationships consequently redefining masculinity. Promise Keepers are attempting to create a new “post modern” family ideal. A family archetype which centers around “Jesus Christ”, their friends and family and a complex definition of masculinity. A Promise Keeper “post modern” definition of family redefines their patterns of gender by altering each members role in the family structure. These families are structured by seven promises which are the center of PK discourse. Promise Keepers deliberately attempt to change families by directing the men with a new definition of masculinity which includes feminist and conservative characteristics.

..Americans have been remaking family life, the vast majority, even those hostile to feminism, have been selectively appropriating feminist principles and practices and fusing these, patchwork style, with old and new gender, kinship, and cultural patterns.¹⁰

⁸ Quoted from Stacey 1990:6

⁹ Stacey 1990:17

¹⁰ Stacey 1990: 6

The Promise Keeper movement is instructed through seven promises which emphasize relationships, intimacy, and service to their loved ones and their Lord Jesus Christ. These changing demands of families create new gender roles and definitions. This thesis explores these transitional gender responsibilities through Promise Keeper men's voices, via the life history method and participant observation. Religion, gender and families are fused together in most American homes. Promise Keeper families are no exception. These families are constantly evolving with new information from religious resources which influence gender roles and responsibilities, and influence their religious views because of changing gender roles and responsibilities.

This thesis explores those new roles and responsibilities. It is a study of masculinity carried out via Promise Keepers men's voices and participant observation. PK men share the common goal to improve their lives in some way. PK leadership offers guidance to attain masculinity by applying seven promises to their lives. These promises are designed to encourage the men to find a place for themselves, becoming "godly influences" in their world. One of my informants explains that the PK, and movements like it, are filling a need that is not being addressed in the church. Prominent writers on masculinity agree with my informant. Michael Kimmel for example, an Associate Professor of Sociology at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, suggests:

there is a yearning in Americans' hearts for something more than crass materialism, craven self-promotion, or the hollow solicitudes of the consumer culture. As a people, we are more spiritually restive, hungrier for an nourishment of the soul, than we have been in years. ¹¹

The reason and frequency people attend church has changed through the years but, the need for community, guidance, and acceptance are variables which are always

¹¹ Kimmel 1996:1

present. Religion serves a number of purposes in various cultures. A broad definition of religion states that this social construction serves important functions for peoples social and psychological needs. Religion reduces anxiety because it helps explain the “unknown”, making it understandable, and providing a comforting “supernatural aid” when needed. Religion also sanctions behavior, sometimes creating separate roles for men and women. Acceptable behavior is engineered by social need, making it easy to transfer the “burden” of judgment “...from individuals to supernatural powers.¹²

In anthropology, specifically feminist anthropology, researchers concentrate on bringing *voice* to the people who are the subject of study.¹³ I follow this approach by using the life history method revived by feminist anthropologists, to bring *voice* to the PK men. I use the life history method to analyze the narratives of the ten men who are associated with the PK movement in Montana. Traditional use of the life history method seeks to understand groups of people, mostly women, who have been marginalized in society by politics and social relationships of power. Promise Keepers; the men who attend rallies, use PK literature, and attend accountability groups, have not been heard as individuals. Normally, PK leaders talk with the media and also express the movements ideology through PK literature.

I intended to use the life history method for my thesis, however, my interviews turned out to more closely resemble the “life stories” in Faye Ginsberg’s 1989 publication of *Contested Lives: The abortion debate in an American community*. Ginsberg, an anthropologist, recorded many smaller versions of life histories, terming them ‘life stories’, because of their length and depth. The life stories I collected were produced by looking at the men’s relationship to their faith, their marriage and children, their

¹² Ed. Haviland 1997:639

¹³ Please see Ortner 1996:14, Leonardo 1991:175-197

background, and how they ended up becoming part of the Promise Keeper movement. I attempted to personally experience their life ways by listening to their narratives.

Feminist anthropologists revived the life history method from early psychological methods of assessment for their clients. Before the method's revival, the definition of the life history includes a "...deliberate attempt to define the growth of a person in a cultural milieu and to make theoretical sense of it".¹⁴ John Dollard, a clinical psychologist, hoped the life history "...will reveal new perspectives on the culture as a whole".¹⁵ The intent of each phase of the life history method are somewhat similar. Each phase, past and present, emphasize the individual, add insight to the culture being studied, and use qualitative methods. The similarities end there, however, because of modified ethics in research practices. The recent lean toward a focus on the 'individual within culture' in anthropological theory has expanded the use and definition of the traditional life history method. The present life history method is applied strictly to women in recently published accounts.¹⁶ These women used standpoint theory, which is researching from the point of view of the subject.

The life history method establishes a relationship between the researcher and subject by allowing for discussion, clarification and interjection during the interviews. The subject is seen through their own words and therefore the data is most likely accurate unless the subject is fabricating the data. The group (researcher and subject(s)) work together to create a information that will be accurate, ethically sound and educational. The relationship can be intimate but, doesn't have to be to delve deep into the lives of the subjects. Feminist anthropologists such as Marjorie Shostak and Julie Cruikshank¹⁷ use

¹⁴ Dollard 1935:3

¹⁵ Dollard 1935:5

¹⁶ Please see Shostak 1981, Ginsberg 1989, Cruikshank 1987

¹⁷ Marjorie Shostak wrote a life history of a Kung woman in her ethnography *Nisa*. Julie Cruikshank created her ethnography with three women of the Yukon territory in her

mutual disclosure and direct quotes from their informants to create in depth qualitative accounts of the lives of the women being studied. These actions bring representation to oppressed people who have not been heard in the past. I am not suggesting that PK men are an oppressed or minority group. I am merely experimenting with the life history method and its parameters to study gender, specifically masculinity in American culture.

For the life history method to be effective, the researcher and informant as a group work together create a narrative employing the subject's 'voice'. 'Voice' is an important aspect of feminist anthropology and the life history method because it reveals world views of people who have previously been unheard. Ironically, men in the Promise Keepers movement are one such group. Officially, the leaders of the movement are the voice of the PK men. However, Americans have not heard from the Promise Keeper's members. 'Voice' is sometimes used as a metaphor in feminist anthropology for power, for this thesis, 'voice' is literal in meaning. I have not attempted to create a forum to emancipate PK men. I do not feel these men are oppressed.

I supplemented my interviews with participant observation in the men's homes and at their congregations. I was invited numerous times to join the PK men's families in a Sunday service. These excursions were a wonderful time to ask questions and become more comfortable with my informants and their life choices. Attending church services was the closest I came to witnessing their faith practices. I was never invited to a PK accountability group meeting, although they were described in detail by several of the men. At youth group meetings, where two of my informants worked, I witnessed their relationships with people outside their family. These supplementary meetings let me observe the men and become an active participant in their life ways.

Primarily, I came in contact with several PK men through another student in one of my classes. My colleague knew that I wanted to interview PK men in Montana and

put me in contact with a pastor of a local church. The pastor then put me in contact with several men who attended PK conferences in the past. These men were wonderful and easygoing. After I gathered information from this circle of friends, one of the men put me in contact with a PK leader who ran a local 'men of integrity' group, who is affiliated with the PK movement. Our interviews took place in either a public place (if the man was from out of town) or in their homes. I gained insight to the men's lives while visiting with them at their own homes. Sometimes their wives were present, some even insisted on participating in the interviews, a positive addition.

Ten families contributed to my research through interviews, excursions and phone conversations. Some were married for fifty years, others for five years. These men came from different congregations but, all expressed a belief in their Lord Jesus Christ. The PK families ranged in economic status from low to upper income levels, falling most of the time into a middle class income bracket. Their education ranged from completion of high school to doctoral study. Six of the ten families choose to raise their children with one caregiver (the woman) at home. Of the remaining families, one split the caregiver duties and the other three both worked full time with support from paid childcare.

The interviews ranged from an hour to three hours in length, with follow up phone calls to informants who were especially interested in my project. I used a tape recorder and a set list of questions which were prepared for a married or single man, with or without children. I then transcribed the interviews and coded each of them. The interviews ended up being a wealth of information, too much to use in a single paper. I choose my informants by meeting families with a male and female spouse because these are the only families recognized by the PK movement, with the exception of divorced heterosexual families.

Specifically, the informant pool for this project represents a wide range of denominations and lifeways. Only two of the ten men were from cities outside Missoula. Four of the men belonged to a Presbyterian church, three belonged to a Pentecostal, one

from a Baptist, one from a Catholic congregation, and one man who states he is Jewish but, freely ministers to several denominations including Christianity through his work with inmates in Montana jails. All of the men consider themselves to be part of Christ centered worship, whatever their denomination. Fundamentalist beliefs vary among the men. Most of the younger men do not consider the foundation of their family values to follow fundamentalist doctrine, although they are involved with PK activities and a movement whose leadership promotes fundamentalist beliefs.

From an anthropological standpoint, the Promise Keeper movement opens up avenues for broad research questions and in depth data collection. Questions such as: Is it possible for PK men to redefine masculinity without overtly involving women and femininity? And, How do these definitions of gender affect social, economic, and religious issues? Anthropology allows the researcher to explore PK from a social standpoint, assessing their effect on families and local communities by investigating peoples ideas, ideals and actions who are directly involved in the movement. PK men, as a whole population, are a diverse group of individuals. PK men in Montana, however, are not diverse because of the overwhelming Anglo population. Montana, has a population of 799, 065, with 93% Anglo, and less then one half percent African American.

This thesis contributes to theories of masculinity and gender.¹⁸ I compare Promise Keeper gender roles to existing parameters for gender roles in American culture. Gender and gender equality are fundamental, yet overlooked aspects of PK literature.

¹⁸Gender theory is discussed by Sherry Ortner in *Making Gender*, various authors in *Gender at the Crossroads of Knowledge*, Janet Finn's chapter in *The Role of Gender in Practice Knowledge: Claiming Half the Human Experience*, and Jean Lipman-Blumen's *Gender Roles and Power*. Several volumes including *Rethinking Masculinity* and *Contemporary Masculinity* discuss the concept of masculinity. *Men's Lives* edited by Michael Kimmel and Michael Messner bring together essays on intimacy and friendship as well as other subjects related to masculinity.

That is, PK literature and other PK resource materials discuss masculinity, and the role of a man as servant leader vs. his wife's role as a servant helper, although both active in mutual submission. They do not, however, address how this redefinition of masculinity will affect PK families and communities. This thesis explores PK masculinity and how it relates to wider gender relations in their families and in their community.

I've organized this thesis in the following way. In chapter one, I survey the history of the PK movement since its inception in 1990. In chapter two, I discuss theories of gender, masculinity, and intimacy related to the PK movement. Each concept is discussed at length for its implications to PK, and to understand the views of the movement. In this thesis, I construct a historical overview of the Promise Keeper movement, highlighting the PK construction of masculinity. In addition to PK literature which concentrates on masculinity, I explore supplementary theories of masculinity by authors including Robert A. Strikwerda, Larry May, and Patrick D. Hopkins. In the third chapter, I highlight PK men's voices. My informants own words describe issues surrounding the PK movement. The last chapter is divided into sections emphasizing the seven promises of a PK. In conclusion, I discuss the future of the PK movement, similar movements which have come into existence because of PK success, and suggested topics for future study.

CHAPTER 1

Historical Overview of the Promise Keeper Movement

The Promise Keeper movement has been filling stadiums with fervent men since 1990. CO-founders Bill McCartney and Dave Wardell were on their way to a meeting of Christian athletes in March of 1990 when they first talked about the idea of organizing men to congregate for the purpose of Christian fellowship. In that same year, 72 men came together to discuss and pray about the concept of filling a venue such as a stadium with Christian men. In July of 1991 at the University of Colorado arena, the first Promise Keeper conference was held with 4200 men .

The official PK web site, PKNet, defines Promise Keepers as a year-round Christian outreach to men. The organization encourages men to “live godly lives”, to accept and commit to seven basic promises, and to form accountability groups to ensure their commitment to Jesus Christ, their families and other people. PK is unique in the sense that it attempts to link Christian men of “all races, denominations, ages, cultures, and socio-economic groups”.¹⁹ The PK organization holds stadium rallies and conducts leadership training for group leaders and regional directors. The Promise Keepers believe that the vital relationships they forge with men through mentors and accountability groups will help them to become “godly influences”. Accountability groups operate through the Promise Keepers local churches. This organization is run by a sixteen person board of directors and has an operating budget of \$117 million in 1997. In the following paragraphs, I will discuss the many facets of the Promise Keepers organization, hereafter called PK.

¹⁹PKNet 1997:2

At the stadium rallies, attendees are exposed to the organizations' Seven Promises which model the PK commitment: "to unite men through vital relationships to become godly influences in their world."²⁰ The seven promises are laid out in the book *Seven Promises of Promise Keeper*, published by the organization, Focus on the Family.²¹ Each PK man is asked to integrate the following seven promises into their lives. First, he must surrender to Jesus each day through prayer, worship and obedience to God's word. He is asked to cultivate "vital relationships" with a small group of men made up of other PK members. The third promise is a pledge of ethical, sexual, and spiritual purity. A PK man must be committed to creating a solid family with Biblical values. He must support his church and his pastor or church leader with financial contributions and prayer. The sixth promise is to support racial reconciliation by seeking out a man of a different ethnicity to befriend and to meet with on a monthly basis. The last promise is a commitment to the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. The great commandment is to love although not because they deserve to be loved. Love them because Christ commands it and empowers us to do so. The latter is the commitment to lead people to Christ or evangelism.²² The man who heads this movement is emphatically committed to the seven promises.

After thirteen years as the University of Colorado as their football coach, with ten years still on his contract, Bill McCartney choose to give up his \$350,000 a year salary and devote his life to his family and the Promise Keepers.²³ Many aspects of McCartney's past are reflected in his surprising decision to leave his coaching career.

²⁰PKNet Background 1997:1

²¹Focus on the Family is a Christian organization run by a member of the Christian Coalition, James Dobson. This organization publishes Citizen magazine which includes voting guides. FOF also runs political schools, teaching members how to run for political office. Clarkson 1997: 36

²² Ed. Janssen 1994:191-193, *Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper*

²³ Hoffer and Smith 1995:1

Promise Keepers, as a Christian leadership outreach, is founded on many of the aspects of McCartney's old congregation, Boulder Valley Vineyard. This church is structured around a fundamentalist belief, the Bible is taken as the literal word of God. In the PK statement of faith, a supplement to the Seven Promises of a PK, the second statement reads "We believe that the Bible is God's written revelation to man and that it is verbally inspired, authoritative, and without error in the original manuscripts."

The two men who have most greatly influenced Bill McCartney's life are leaders of Boulder Valley Vineyard and the Word of God Church, Jim Berlucci and James Ryle, respectively.²⁴ They have contributed to the Promise Keeper code of moral values through their congregations' policies and moral principles. According to an article written by Russ Bellant, *Mania in the stadia: the origins and goals of Promise Keepers*, Bill McCartney first became involved with the Word of God community while he was assistant coach at the University of Michigan. Jim Berlucci, the leader of the WOG congregation, heads a "select and insular group of about 1,600 adults, practicing 'shepherding/discipleship'".²⁵ WOG expects its followers to submit to "the head" and to account for every aspect of their lives. They must turn in their schedules to the leader in advance accounting for life decisions such as marriage partners and job positions as well as daily decisions such as choosing TV programs and movies. ²⁶ The structure of WOG resembles worship and fellowship seen in PK accountability groups. These groups do not require PK men to submit a schedule, but they do offer the men a way to account for their choices in daily and life decisions. The other man who has greatly influenced Bill McCartney is the Reverend James Ryle, from the Boulder Valley Vineyard. Ryle "....believes PK, of which he is a board member, is the fulfillment of the Biblically

²⁴ Bellant 1995:2

²⁵ Bellant 1995:2

²⁶ Bellant 1995:2

prophesied end-time army described in the Book of Joel a terrifying army from which there is no escape.”²⁷

In the midst of PK growth, McCartney has continued to be politically active in the right-wing. A 1996 article written by Nancy Novosad sums up his political history. She writes

McCartney has a well documented history of radical right-wing political activism, including membership on the board of Colorado for Family Values, the virulent anti-gay organization in Colorado Springs. He has connections to Randall Terry and has given speeches to Terry’s group Operation Rescue.²⁸

McCartney’s political activism promotes PK. He is comfortable speaking in large groups. McCartney does not always have the most popular opinion, however, he stands by his beliefs hoping to sway others to a similar perspective.

PK has celebrated the steady meteoric growth of conference attendance since its inception in 1990. At the first rally in Colorado, 4200 men joined together at the Coors event center in 1991. The following year 22,000 men came together at Folsom Field. In 1993, the numbers doubled to 50,000 men attending a PK rally. The largest increase, nearly four fold in 1994 put 278,600 men in stadiums nationwide. Attendance doubled the next year, claiming 727,342 men at 13 stadium events. In 1996, the numbers reached over one million in 22 stadiums throughout the nation. The largest single gathering of PK men happened in Washington D.C on Saturday October 4th at the National Mall. “Stand in the Gap: A Sacred Assembly of Men” aimed at “every man in the United States of America who has named Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.”²⁹

²⁷ Bellant 1995:3

²⁸ Novosad 1996:4

²⁹ PKNet 1997:2

PK budget totals are just as amazing as their conference attendance records. In 1993, with 22 paid workers, PK worked with a budget of 4 million dollars. The following year the budget swelled to six times as much the previous year, \$26 million and a staff increase to 150. In 1995, with over 300 staff, the PK organization had a budget of 64 million dollars. The staff increased to 360 the following year; the budget swelled to almost a hundred million. In 1997, PK organization's largest staff of 452 persons operated with a budget of \$117 million. This budget was reduced dramatically with the proposed cut of all staff members and free entrance into PK stadium events.³⁰ A recent donation to the PK organization of over 4 million dollars ensured that PK could rehire their 452 staff members and continue to schedule the spring and summer rallies and seminars set for 1998.³¹

Membership for men in Montana is comparable to the national average for rally and leadership participation during the most sizable events hosted by the Promise Keepers. The Human Rights Network News (November of 1995) analyzes the height of Promise Keeper popularity talking about Montana PK and their leadership numbers . "During March and April, Promise Keepers held a series of Wake Up Calls"-two and a half hour long inspirational membership-building meetings in seven Montana cities.³² Al Henry, a retired commander of the Malstrom Air Force Base believes that PK have attracted almost six thousand "promise seekers" because of those meetings. In 1995, they trained "point men" and "ambassadors" during sessions to learn to conduct cell group meetings at their local churches in numerous cities. At this time there were seven regional coordinators located in Montana's seven largest cities. A national conference was held in Great Falls in December of 1995. The stadium attendance has been in

³⁰ PKNet 1997:1

³¹ *ibid.*

³² Montana Human Rights Network News Nov.1995 Vol.5, No.2,

decline since 1996. “Average turnout has slid from 50,000 men per event in 1996 to 36,000 men in 1997.”³³

The Promise Keeper movement uses the supplemental leadership seminars held throughout the nation to educate PK attendees who wish to volunteer and begin their own cell group or become a regional leader. These include “Men’s Ministry Leadership, Foundations for Effective Men’s Ministry, and Building Men of Integrity.”³⁴ These smaller conferences, or workshops, are held in the cities not frequented by larger rallies. The workshops are provided by Promise Keepers to support men’s ministry in churches and in the community. “There is a leadership seminar for those who have already attended the larger rallies, and in PK home state of Colorado graduates of these seminars work with men’s groups in some eight hundred churches.”³⁵ PK outreach touches many men in Montana. PK men continue the connection and energy felt at the stadium rallies and workshops by communicating on the Internet. Local Montana men who consider themselves Promise Keepers are not always aware of who the organizations leadership is or what the leadership is involved in outside this men’s movement.

Promise Keepers Leadership

The Promise Keepers is a non-profit organization headed by a 16 member board of directors. The organization claims that “PK is not a political or partisan organization”³⁶ Promise Keepers may not be overtly involved in politics, but each of their leaders is involved politically to some degree. The local leaders in Montana have attended leadership seminars and volunteer for their area. I assess these men apart from the head leadership in Boulder, Colorado. Regional leaders organize events, report to the leaders

³³ Great Falls Tribune Feb, 2 1998

³⁴ PKNet: Our Background 1997: 2

³⁵ Van Leeuwen 1997:3

³⁶ PKNet: Fact Sheet 1997:1

in Boulder, and advise local leaders. According to PKNet, there are 6 regional heads in Montana.

The PK organization claims “PK has no affiliation with the Christian Coalition. PK is not politically motivated in any way.”³⁷ The leaders and contributors for PK are overtly involved in right wing politics. Many of the PK leaders are members of the Christian Coalition. Bill McCartney is the CEO, Randy Phillips is the President and Thomas Fortson is the Chief Operating Officer.³⁸ Leader support for PK includes money, staff, TV publicity, radio air time, publications, and personal time and energy.

The Christian Coalition founder, Ralph Reed, explains that the Christian Coalition is “...a middle class, highly educated suburban phenomenon of baby-boomers with children who are motivated by their concerns about family.”³⁹ Many are leaders of their own groups outside of PK. Groups such as Focus on the Family, Operation Rescue, Families First and Campus Crusade for Christ are promoted through speeches, literature, and other PK resources. Ties with these organizations have prompted much debate in the media over PK intentions and political aspirations.⁴⁰ We cannot separate a movement from its leaders since all the information to followers of PK is created by outlying organizations who have definitive political aspirations and goals for believers.

In *Eternal Hostilities: Democracy and Theocracy*, Frederick Clarkson analyzes one of the PK leaders, James Dobson, and his contribution to the movement publishing PK literature and providing promotional time for the organization on his radio broadcast. He is a well known author on the subjects of families and marriage. James Dobson, a

³⁷ PKNet: Questions 1997

³⁸ PKNet: Fact Sheet 1997:2

³⁹ Cromartie 1996:1

⁴⁰ Please see Bellant 1995, Clarkson 1997, Swomley 1996, Novosad 1996

best selling author and founder of Focus on the Family, supported PK when it was first starting out. ⁴¹ Frederick Clarkson writes that Dobson,

is a member of the Alexandria, Virginia based Council for National Policy, a secretive, conservative leadership group which meets quarterly and is comprised of several hundred top strategists, funders and political operatives including Howard Ahmanson, Bill Bright, Jerry Falwell, Beverly and Tim LaHaye, Kay Cole James, Peter Marchall, Gary North, Howard Phillips, Larry Pratt, R.J. Rushdoony, Ralph Reed, Pat Robertson, Paul Weyrich, Don Wildmon and others... ⁴²

This enduring support connects PK to politics and offers access to information provided on the Internet, radio and literature. Politics defined as any actions or activities which have “...political consequences in relation to government and policy”.⁴³ Promise keeper leadership is involved in changing political policy. Many of the PK books are published by James Dobson’s organization, Focus on the Family Publishing. There are many other Christian Coalition and right-wing political leaders who support the Promise Keepers. The following paragraphs summarize some of the men’s contributions to PK.

The Human Rights Network offers a packet of information about the Promise Keepers and provides summaries of some of the other movements leaders. The Montana Human Rights network is dedicated to helping “communities counter the efforts of extremists [who] undermine democracy, ..promote intolerance, ..limit equality,..and create an anti-democratic atmosphere in which violence and intimidation become acceptable tools for political activism.”⁴⁴ Bill Bright, the founder and president of

⁴¹ Ed. Janssen 1994:103

⁴² Clarkson 1997:194

⁴³ Marshall 1994:398

⁴⁴ www.initco.net : about MHRN

Campus Crusade of Christ⁴⁵ provides staff volunteers and financial support for PK. Another prominent speaker is Tony Evans who is a principal PK rally speaker. In the book, *Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper*, Evans writes a chapter on spiritual purity which focuses on the “feminization “ of the American male. He supports the idea for men to fill their place as spiritually pure leaders in the “nuclear” or “modern” family.⁴⁶ Another PK speaker who is connected to the Christian Coalition is E.V. Hill. He is a supporter and committee member for the Coalition on Revival. This group believes in “Christian reconstructionism,” which intends to create a nation ruled by “Biblical Law”, not democracy.

Charles Colson, writer of the book, *Born Again*, is a political activist. He is the man who openly supported the Republican candidate Robin Hayes at a Promise Keeper rally in 1996. He stood on stage in Charlotte North Carolina advocating his candidate and did not receive any criticism from the self proclaimed non political PK organization. Pat Robertson, seen on television during his program, the 700 Club, features Promise Keeper rally’s and select speeches on his show. He has also featured Bill McCartney to advertise PK and talk about upcoming national events. Pat Robertson is the founder of the Christian Coalition, a grassroots citizen organization. They are concerned with pro-family legislation in Washington. The Christian Coalition considers themselves a “leaner, more savvy movement” than the past conservative political movements. They align themselves with “evangelicals, Roman Catholics, Greek Orthodox, Jews, African Americans and Hispanics.”⁴⁷

The Christian Coalition is highly political. In addition to the leaders promotion of their ideas from radio programs, books, speeches, television programs, the CC conducts seminars across the country. These nationwide seminars help grassroots politicians learn

⁴⁵ Ed. Janssen :1994:184

⁴⁶ Challenging the Promise Keepers: An Organizers Packet 1997: 14

⁴⁷ Christian Coalition.org/about.html 1995:1

how to get elected and gain influential leadership positions. Some of the seminars teach people how to be elected to local school boards.⁴⁸ These positions carry a tremendous amount of weight in small communities. Issues such as sex and health education and gay rights are successfully stifled through this political maneuvering, effectively creating “Christian” based policies. Small scale activism in public schools evolves into more prominent political positions in the community placing members of the Christian Coalition, including Promise Keepers men into the political arena.

Promise Keepers and Politics

The political impact of Promise Keepers has yet to manifest. The amount of financial as well as staff member support from political organizations invariably ties the movement with the unstable world of politics. Article after article describe PK as a “masked political machine.....PK is actually a well-financed project of leading evangelical conservatives. Ostensibly nonpolitical, it is a movement of unmistakable political importance.”⁴⁹

There is no doubt that the PK leaders are political. They attempt to downplay their political efforts in PK media. Promoting instead, their seven promises and their statement of faith. Promise Keepers is well established on the Internet. They have an extensive web page where one can find things like how to volunteer at a conference, enter a prayer chat room, general information about PK and the most frequently asked questions about the organization. These questions range in subject matter from politics to psychology. PKNet directly answers questions everyone is asking. If someone questions the organizations actions or stances on a certain issue, the issue is addressed and

⁴⁸ The Christian Coalition held the first seminar in Atlanta in May 1995, followed by a series of seminars in every state. There were 114 people from 22 states at the first seminar, 75% or more wanted to become school board candidates. Swomley 1996:2

⁴⁹ Conason et al. 1996:12

answered by PK staff on the Internet. The Internet site for the PK is filled with apolitical information on the organization. Inside the chat rooms is another story. The men who chat discuss many things, including the legality of prayer in school on a daily basis.

Nancy Novosad quotes a radical right policy analyst with the Institute for First Amendment Studies, Skip Porteous, who is tracking the information discussed in the chat rooms, "They're building a list right now of 'godly politicians' to pray for, ...It's almost totally political," he says."⁵⁰ Among PK followers, Ami Neiberger noticed "that abortion is the No. 1 topic-- not the woman's right to choose, but an abortion opponent's right to kill abortionists."⁵¹ Many other topics are discussed online such as political initiatives and upcoming elections.

Political Watchdog Groups and Military Metaphors

The Montana Human Rights Network believes PK organization undermines democracy by promoting theocracy. They believe that PK uses fundamentalism along with a position of conflating all Christian churches into a Parachurch movement.⁵² They also state that their aspects of fundamentalism that implicit PK resource material and essential to understanding the potential of any fundamentalist thought. For example, heterosexual men are the only people who are created in God's image. Only real Christians, fundamentalist and evangelical, are going to heaven. Lastly, HRN states that PK believe Christians are not "true" Christians if they do not hold the same political views as PK.⁵³

Several Christian and faith-based groups are concerned with the Promise Keeper movement and its leadership. Watchdog groups consist of clergy, people of faith,

⁵⁰ Novosad 1996:2

⁵¹ Ireland 1997: C03

⁵² From Challenging the Promise Keepers: An Organizers packet Aug 1997

⁵³ *ibid.*

democratic studies organizations or human rights groups who are concerned with the discourse at PK rallies and by their leadership. The Montana Human Rights Network , for example, has 1300 members. It reports and monitors radical right wing groups in Montana. Another group, the Interfaith Alliance, states that their purpose is “ committed to the positive role of religion as a healing and constructive force in public life.” They offer people of different faiths an opportunity “to challenge those who manipulate religion to promote an extreme political agenda based on false gospel of irresponsible individualism”⁵⁴

Another such group, Equal Partners in Faith from the People of Faith Network, is “a national coalition of clergy and faith-based activists committed to equality among all people.”⁵⁵ Equal Partners in Faith devote time and energy as advocates of the constitution’s first amendment. This group believes in the right for the Promise Keepers to have a religious movement and see it as a rejuvenating experience for “mainstream denominations” because they feel the need to reevaluate how churches are serving the public. Equal Partners in Faith does not attempt to slander the men who go to Promise Keeper rallies. The group suggests that the men are “clearly ...seeking spiritual connection with other men, and help with the complex questions society poses to all of us: how to be a better family member, community member, person of faith and morality...”⁵⁶ They do, however, question PK potentially divisive tactics within churches.

References to war and an ensuing battle occasionally appear in PK interviews, PK literature, and speeches at rallies. These references have been detrimental to the PK image in the media. It is difficult to interpret these references, as metaphorical or literal from the PK leaders. The leaders have stated that they believe there is a war being fought

⁵⁴ www.tialliance.org: mission statement

⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁶ Challenging the Promise Keepers: An Organizers Packet 1997:19

in America today. L.Dean Allen, a Ph.D. candidate in Social Ethics and Sociology of Religion at Boston University, attended a rally in North Carolina. He quotes Steve Farrar, president of Men's Leadership Ministries, "We are at war. The enemy is engaged in a full-fledged assault in Christian families."⁵⁷ The Christian right wants to see the return of 'the good old days'. John Swomley is a professor emeritus at the St.Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, Missouri. He believes that the war PK and the Christian coalition refer to is "...against secularism, abortion, homosexuality, and other enemies of the far right."⁵⁸

References to war create a sense of urgency, and the ability to triumph if faith is sufficient. McCartney is quoted "What you are about to hear is God's word (at 1993 rally) to the men of this nation. We are going to war as of tonight. We have divine power; that is our weapon. We will not compromise. Wherever truth is at risk, in the schools or legislature, we are going to contend for it. We will win".⁵⁹ Both schools and legislature believes the claim to be political. The co.-founder of PK has also uses war references to direct his agenda. Dave Wardell is quoted by Steven Bellant from the Denver Post, "We want our nation to return to God. We're drawing the line in the sand here...There has already been controversy about abortion and homosexuality. I hope there won't be any physical confrontations..."⁶⁰ These statements affirm the mission of PK, "...dedicated to uniting men", with rhetoric of a good vs. evil battle, "... to become godly forces in their world."⁶¹ General rhetoric proclaimed by the PK leadership shadow their ideas about homosexuality, racial reconciliation and gender inequality.

⁵⁷ Allen 1997:3

⁵⁸ Swomley 1996:4

⁵⁹ Bellant 1995:2

⁶⁰ Bellant 1995:3

⁶¹ PKNet : Our background 1997:1

Fundamentalism is a critical aspect of Promise Keeper beliefs. In Promise Keepers Statement of Faith (which can be found on their web page) the second statement reads, “We believe that the Bible is God’s written revelation to man and that it is verbally inspired , authoritative, and without error in the original manuscripts.”⁶² This simple definition infuses PK literature, speeches, and rallies. ‘Fundamentalism’ is one of the highly contested aspects of PK to define what is acceptable and unacceptable. Church leaders who do not interpret the Bible literally have a difficult time applying PK to their lives and their churches men’s ministries. PK promotes the Scripture as God’s own voice, to be taken literally, regardless of who wrote the books within the bible or its historical and social context of the time. From a literal reading of the bible, fundamentalism also threatens the leadership of women in church because men and women are considered spiritually unequal.

Evangelical feminists have profoundly effected the Promise Keeper movement. Judith Stacey, a scholar on families who did extensive fieldwork with evangelical families, explains that of the evangelical population, there are few feminists but, these women have had a lasting effect on evangelical literature, sermons, and lifeways . She goes on to state that, “Indeed, feminist ideas and practices have diffused broadly throughout evangelical Christian discourse in the United States today.”⁶³ Stacey’s description of evangelical church leaders and their followers in her work is similar to the men I talked with who define themselves as either PK followers or PK rally attendees. One of Stacey’s informants, an evangelical church leader is described as an “..unexpected blend of fundamentalism and feminism, of formal patriarchal principles and informal egalitarian practices...”⁶⁴ Judith Stacey’s observation of these complex characteristics

⁶² PKNet 1997:1

⁶³ Stacey 1990:139

⁶⁴ Stacey 1990:137

associated with evangelicals, supports my findings surrounding Promise Keepers and their discourses.

PK literature talks about mutual submission as the basis for Christian marriages. This idea was first introduced by evangelical feminists twenty-five years ago. This ideal was brought into evangelical circles in 1973 when a group of people gathered for a left-wing Evangelicals for Social action gathered to take a pro-active approach to their faith. They added a clause to the sentiments, “We call both men and women to mutual submission and active discipleship.”⁶⁵ Additionally, these Christian feminists lobbied for women’s role in the church as leaders, inclusive language in biblical interpretation and challenged scriptural basis for the subordination of women.⁶⁶ Promise Keeper leadership has borrowed the term “mutual submission” from Christian feminists, combining the practice with subsequent gender specific roles for men as “servant leader” and women as “servant helper”.

Stadium Rallies and Accountability Groups

PK stadium rally’s have been described by my informants as “inspiring”, “a lot of hype”, “spiritual”, and “unbelievably overwhelming and life changing”.⁶⁷ The rallies are held in sports stadiums or coliseums across the country. Men gather to cheer, chant, sing, worship, pray, and cry. Speakers are flown in from across the country; bands boom their Christian rock; cheers are started on one side of the stadium, “we love Jesus yes we do, we love Jesus how bout’ you?... The other side of the stadium hollers back to show their support for Jesus. Some men who attend are only subtly affected. Other men claim it was a life-changing experience which turned them away from drugs, alcohol and smoking. As we view promotional tapes at the home of an informant, we watch as the cheers roar over the stadium. A speaker states “ The time has come for each of us....to

⁶⁵ Stacey 1990:141

⁶⁶ Stacey 1990:143

⁶⁷ Personal interviews February- May, 1998. Missoula, MT

seize the moment”. My informant chokes up watching the video. He excitedly puts in another tape, one about the recent gathering in Washington DC. The anticipated million participants join for what is termed ‘Stand in the Gap: A sacred Assembly of Men’, a Biblical verse which is a metaphor for any obstacle to a man submitting to Jesus. This could be anything from racial hatred to infidelity.

PK men are searching for something to bring home, something that makes them feel better about their lives, something to bring them closer to Jesus. PK rally’s are a combination of Billy Graham revivals, TV evangelism, and football games. PK encourages only men to participate in the rallies, because, the PK organization reasons, men need to recognize their place in society. Men seek confirmation of who they are and who they can be. Frederick Clarkson, an expert on the activity of the far right, writes that, “the rallies are so popular because these weekend conclaves are homey, fun, and designed to create a middle class comfort zone for male bonding into what it means to be a “Christian man”.”⁶⁸ This is an adequate description of my informant pool, while it may not be an accurate for other Promise Keeper populations.

The men who attend the rallies do not necessarily commit themselves to PK for 25 years, which is the expectation for PK followers. No official count has been documented on the number of men who actually commit 25 years after attending a PK rally.⁶⁹ Non-committed or unofficial PK members make up about half of my informants. These men chose to use the study guides provided at the conferences to run their own Bible studies. Other men become deeply involved and attend seminars to be ‘point men’ or ambassadors’ for the cell groups within churches. “Each ambassador must agree with the PK “statement of Faith” and with the “Seven Promises” and each must be recommended by his pastor, who must also agree to the PK mission.”⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Clarkson 1997:190

⁶⁹ Clarkson 1997:191

⁷⁰ Swomley 1996:3

Initially, Promise Keepers promotes visible public relations through rallies to draw men into the movement. To sustain the energy created at the stadium rallies, PK promotes small group interaction among its members. Accountability groups, headed by a point man, are formed after the men return from PK conferences. Steve Chavis, a PK spokesman, told Christianity Today in an article by John Swomley that, "All of our success is contingent upon men taking part in small groups when they return home."⁷¹ A cell group is made up of five men who meet weekly to discuss their lives with the support of PK resources. Some accountability groups are informal and do not have an official PK leader who reports back to PK headquarters. In 1996, there were over 19,000 local volunteer accountability group leaders who "served as liaisons between these groups and PK".⁷² Typically, men in an accountability group are also in the same congregation. There are also larger meetings held in some cities which combine a few accountability groups from several churches.

Each week, PK accountability groups get together to discuss their lives and relationships. They navigate the meetings with PK study guides, other resource materials, PK videos, or just the Bible. Others groups have a leader who reports to the ambassador, who then reports to headquarters in Boulder. It is not clear what is done with the information gathered at the weekly meetings by the point men. One informant explained that the information is used to improve outreach and assess speaker subject material.

PK outreach groups are currently being phased out into another type of accountability group according to one of my informants who is an ambassador. Montana accountability groups meet to discuss their lives, fears, accomplishments, business, temptations, sins, relationships, and serving their church. Accountability groups are designed to strengthen men's ministries. In an article by a Christian feminist and

⁷¹ As cited in Bellant 1995:3

⁷² PKNet Our Background 1997:2

professor of Psychology at Eastern College in Pennsylvania, Mary Stewart VanLeeuwen discusses the future of the PK movement. She states "...on the national scale these grass-roots accountability groups are too recent to have had annual systematic evaluation research published on them to see ...if they really do strengthen local congregational life."⁷³

Some men come join larger groups which include men from various congregations. These men meet once a month with whoever would like to join and worship. The two groups with whom I am familiar with meet regularly at the church of the PK ambassadors. These groups are created by local ambassadors who have attended PK rallies and want to continue the energy felt at the rallies. Men who attend two separate groups described these groups as supplemental to their accountability groups.

Mentor Relationships

To supplement the accountability groups, PK men mentor other men in their lives and are expected to seek out their own mentors. One of the essays in *Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper* explains the mentor aspect of PK as another way to account for PK men's decisions. The men are asked to apply the mentor's creed to their lives. It reads, "The things you have heard... in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.(Tim 2:2)"⁷⁴ The chapter also explains that men should have three different types of mentors in their lives. PK mentors have a spiritual commitment to each other to develop a person's highest potential. An older man acts as a teacher who can give advice. Every PK is encouraged to find a second man who is a peer to account for his daily decisions. A third man is a younger man who the PK man can "correct and direct, teach and...pray for"⁷⁵ These three relationships are integral to PK accountability. Mentors and accountability groups help PK leadership

⁷³ Van Leeuwen 1997:3

⁷⁴ Ed. Janssen 1994:66

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

sustain energetic followers. Along with mentor relationships, PK men are expected to forge relationships with men who are of a different ethnicity than themselves.

Promise Keepers Racial and Gender Ideologies

Issues of gender inequality, racial reconciliation and homophobia are all areas in which the PK movement clash with the media and most of the public population. While racial reconciliation is an issue that PK addressed reverently hoping to mend historical wounds, issues of homophobia and gender hierarchy are seldom discussed. The issue of racial reconciliation is the sixth of the seven promises of a PK. The organization believes racism is one of the things that “Stand(s) in the Gap” between man and God. The PK organization is built on the foundations of two of the “most racially integrated institutions in society: professional athletic teams and the armed forces.”⁷⁶ There is, however, controversy surrounding their methods of relieving racial problems in the United States. PK attempt to confront racism through reconciliation. For the PK man, this means actively seeking a man of a different race to meet with once a month. Rally speakers, training seminars, PK literature, the Internet and talk radio all provide the message of reconciliation for the PK.

This message is met by much debate from people who do not think racial issues can be cleared up in the United States by fostering friendships. Reverend Velma Brock quoted in Frederick Clarkson’s book *Eternal Hostility*, states that “African Americans have been divided from their families and their communities since they were brought to America as slaves. “African Americans,” she says, “do not need one more source of division, particularly between men and women,” who need to have relationships founded “on an equal basis.”⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Conason et al. 1996:6

⁷⁷ Clarkson 1997:194

Some PK followers feel that there is too much emphasis placed on racial reconciliation. A pastor from Arenzville Illinois, Neal Kellam, explains his view on racial inequality.

Personally, I think we're trying too hard. As a whole, especially in the Christian Community, don't think that there is that much of a division...If we didn't give it so much attention, I think it would die on it's own accord.⁷⁸

Others feel that racial reconciliation as one of the seven promise of a PK is just not enough to make a significant difference to the people it directly effects. Randall Bailey, a professor at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Georgia states "...PK is not dealing with the deepest challenges to overcoming racism...making tangible changes in the systems that have been racist---and dismantling institutions that support racism."⁷⁹

Additionally, a legal worker with the Center for Constitutional Rights in New York, David Love believes that PK reconciliation method is not enough provides us with a perspective on the difference between reconciliation and justice. "As a concept , reconciliation is quite different from equality or justice. ...A slave and slave master may reconcile, but that will not necessarily alter their fundamental relationship."⁸⁰ Love goes on to note that the PK leaders and other prominent men who support conservative Christian political organizations oppose measures that support affirmative action which was designed to destroy the injustice of racism. He states that it will take more than having minority speakers and staff to create an organization "... that is sympathetic to people of a darker hue. " ⁸¹ In the book *Eternal Hostility: the Struggle between*

⁷⁸ Hamilton 1996:2

⁷⁹ Quoted from Hamilton 1996:2

⁸⁰ Love 1997:72

⁸¹ *ibid.*

Theocracy and Democracy, Frederick Clarkson discusses his views on racial reconciliation. He writes,

...they present “racial reconciliation” like they invented it. What’s more, their approach to race glosses over racial and economic injustice past and present, blames men for their circumstances, and turns a blind eye to the major actors in society , and the major sources of solutions.” ⁸²

Homosexuality, an issue which is personally dealt with about as much as racism for most PK men, is a highly political as well as moral issue for the organization. PK leaders, specifically the two founders of Promise Keepers, make it an issue in their lives through political action. Bill McCartney has been involved in anti-gay initiatives in Colorado, the national headquarters of PK. He is involved as a proponent of Amendment 2, a controversial bill that denies legal rights to gay and lesbian people seeking restitution for discrimination in “employment an housing”. This bill was found to be unconstitutional by the United States Supreme court. ⁸³

Another issue PK raise which pertain to gender inequality is conversion: people who are homosexual can be “converted to heterosexuality, though this premise has been negated by reputable organizations such as the American Psychological Association.” ⁸⁴ This rhetoric from PK leaders and speakers can only be categorized as political because the issue of homosexuality is a current topic of current legislation. Ballot initiatives, hate crime bills, and adoptive parenting rights for homosexual populations are just a few of the topics which PK adamantly oppose. Along with issues of homosexuality, PK does not discuss gender inequality as a social injustice. Although gender is a focus in PK

⁸² Clarkson 1997:193

⁸³ Challenging the PK: An Organizers Packet 1997:16

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

literature, delving into characteristics of masculinity, the issue of gender inequality is not considered.

Gender is explicit for the PK organization. There is a clear definition of gender roles because the organization follows fundamentalist doctrine. Family is ideally defined as a 'little church' with the male as head of the household, a wife and then children if any. Drawing from a Biblical definition of family, the PK extracts the scripture "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church." Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, a Christian feminist, does not think that PK is deliberately projecting an irreverent view of women. She explains, "Prejudices about the primacy of men usually exist as unexamined, unarticulated, culturally- conditioned assumptions, which are passed onto and received by others in the same way,"⁸⁵ She asserts that PK just perpetuate what they know, or don't know. This attitude does not encourage PK men to challenge the existing social, economic, and political inequality of women.

For Promise Keepers, there is no need to question these inequalities because the Bible clearly places the sexes in a hierarchy. The roles and responsibilities are ideally socially defined for PK families, there are certain activities for males and females. Gender inequality or hierarchy within families is associated with an outdated idea of a 'healthy' American family. Promise Keeper families are varied in their makeup. Some are divorced, with step children. Some are families with adopted children. Most of the men I interviewed in Montana, however, are (heterosexual) first marriages with their own biological children.

A specific example of gender inequality in PK doctrine is from E.Glenn Wagner's book *Strategies for a Successful Marriage: A Study Guide for Men*. The author talks

⁸⁵ Van Leeuwen 1997:14

about “praying over your wife”. Wagner uses an excerpt from a speech given by Bill McCartney as an example of appropriate behavior for husbands and wives.

Almighty God is calling men to pray over their families in such a way that, if a man will pray daily, regularly, over his wife, praying for God’s blessing upon her, Almighty God will restore her self image...Our women need a man providing the spiritual tempo and leadership in the home. ⁸⁶

This exercise is performed with his hand on her shoulder. There are no instructions to *pray over your husband*. A woman is implicitly defined as spiritually unequal if she cannot pray for herself to fulfill her spiritual needs.

Wives of PK are involved in the transitions of Promise Keeper men through daily experience. These women are not, however, involved in the organization or planning of PK events or PK literature. Van Leeuwen explains that the apparent spiritual inequality of women by PK is a tool to reclaim masculinity. In the next chapter, I will explore PK masculinity in detail. The following statement is a common view of PK masculinity held by Promise Keepers and their supporters.

...due to men’s unique needs and weaknesses at this point in history, they need special help in learning to understand and implement those promises. Thus the apparent conflation of manliness with godliness is not a deliberate attempt to marginalize women or see them as religiously less significant, but merely a rhetorical device to capture men’s attention and make them realize that they are potentially vital contributors to home and church life, no more, but certainly not less important than women. ⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Swomley 1996:2

⁸⁷ Van Leeuwen 1997:15

CHAPTER 2

Promise Keeper Masculinity:

“Honey, I’ve made a terrible mistake...”

In this chapter, I will attempt to unravel the complex aspects of PK masculinity. PK have modified traditional masculinity by including some progressive characteristics to the definition, declared by PK leadership through various discourses. These characteristics are progressive because PK men are encouraged to: form intimate relationships with men and women, nurture their children, and pursue non materialistic work values. The PK organization encourages men to form intimate relationships with members of their accountability groups. PK also promotes gender inequality through PK literature and fundamentalism. In the next several paragraphs, I will define key terms such as gender, discourses, and masculinity. These will help clarify the nuances of PK masculinity. PK have successfully used gender to define themselves through a unique venue of intimate relationships with family members and other PK men.

Gender is a fluid concept. Gender weaves together concepts including role responsibilities, choices, and limitations into a specific, sometimes rigid set of expectations for men and women in today’s society. Gender can simply be defined as “socially created behaviors assigned differently to men and women”.⁸⁸ However, gender is a concept which has many facets. It is a concept which can describe, affirm, and redefine an individual or social group. Sherry Ortner, a prominent scholar of feminist anthropology, describes gender as a concept which has a two fold “operating”

⁸⁸ Lipman -Blumen 1984:1

mechanism. Ortner explains how gender is produced and reproduced with the term, “making gender”. She explains that in one sense, gender is constructed through theorists “...directing us to see subjects as constructed by, and subject to, the cultural and historical discourses within which they must operate.”⁸⁹ Ortner also uses the term “making gender” in the sense that as humans, we are social actors in our lives and contribute to the social group. She points out that people “enact”, “resist”, or “negotiate” the world as given, and in so doing “make” the world.

Promise Keepers, as a social group, “redefine” their masculinity by reproducing traditional gender definitions through multiple forms of discourse. Discourse, meaning the transmission of knowledge in “...both written and oral forms and in the social practices of everyday life”⁹⁰ Stating ideas and sharing knowledge through various forms in PK literature, videos, powerful seminars, and rallies creates a profound influence on the followers lives. Ideas which are left unsaid by PK leadership have similar influence on PK families. PK leave delineation for families up for interpretation, modifying the behavior of individuals in these households by defining new kin roles for women and men through specific ideals of masculinity.

To be a person in American society hinges on what it means to be a man or a woman, no matter what sex a person is labeled at birth. Every person is identified by gender. Gender distinctions are not binary, but fluid. For the purposes of this project, however, I will rely on traditional gender definitions to make comparisons because the families that I interviewed fit into the “nuclear” mold, with a male and female as parents and children who accept traditional definitions of gender roles, backed by fundamentalist doctrine. Some people in the United States, push the limits of gender identity. These people explore the world of “gender treachery”, a term coined by Margaret Atwood in

⁸⁹ Ortner 1996:1

⁹⁰ Discourse, Power and Resistance 1982:111

her novel *The Handmaid's Tale* and used by Patrick Hopkins in his article on masculinity and threatened identities. Hopkins describes the act of gender treachery as “anyone who “violates” the rules of gender identity/gender performance, i.e. someone who rejects or appears to reject the criteria by which the genders are differentiated.”⁹¹ This term applies to many people in contemporary society, some examples include: homosexuals, woman athletes, stay at home dads, and women who choose to not bear children. I would like to use gender treachery in a different way to explain PK masculinity. I use the term in the following discussion to describe a social group which is simultaneously pushing the limits of traditional masculinity while forcing the resurrection of traditional practices of masculinity through discourses.

PK men have adopted a new set of gender boundaries which extract elements from contrasting definitions of masculinity which include some traditional characteristics as well as intimate relationships with men, non-materialistic values, and nurturing child rearing practices. I will use the term “gender treachery” as a way to describe PK discourses which are promoted through accountability groups, speeches, and literature. Hopkins uses “gender treachery” as a way to explain the resistance some social groups come up against when they push the boundaries of gender in the United States.

PK have also come against opposition because these men have chosen to form a new masculinity which stresses intimate relationships and fundamentalist practices. This modified definition has encountered public resistance from church leaders, scholars and people who read or hear about Promise Keeper objectives. For example, a Baptist minister in Missoula Montana who agreed to talk with me about PK, adamantly opposes the group. He states that

There are no ‘vital’ relationships in my life except for my wife and I , These PK are messing it up with emotional stuff, they are not going to tell me how to be a

⁹¹ Hopkins 1996:98

man, the bible tells me how to be a man, if you ask me, they are all sissy's. There are these wimpy men who have been influenced by feminism. I am not a feminist or a 'femi-nazi'. People like Pat Ireland, NOW, and Gloria Steinem; Do you know who I'm talking about? They have made it possible for women to push men around. They have created this need for real men.⁹²

Promise Keepers, by defining who they are, and more importantly who they are not: homosexuals and women, have successfully averted attacks from most other men. They have, however, encountered resistance from groups who are concerned with gender equality and human rights such as the Montana Human Rights Network, Equal Partners in Faith and The Center for Democratic Studies.

While Promise Keeper manhood encourages non-competitiveness, intimate friendships, non materialistic ideals, nurturing of children, and non aggressive behavior, the group still relies on characteristics which promote gender inequality through fundamentalism. Rhetoric about "submission" and "feminization", which is also a part of PK masculinity, promotes the inequality of women. This social order, which is "natural" for fundamentalist believers, helps define PK manhood. However, PK men who are affirming their own form of masculinity are in essence affirming who they are through intimate relationships. They develop this sense of self through "...knowledge of others." In accountability groups, for example, their relationships determine a new model of manhood for themselves and their fathers, sons, daughters, and wives.

"Modern" Households and Submission

PK families can take away what they want from the organization's rhetoric on gender roles. Some PK men decide to promote their role as the spiritual head of the household overtly, and others use the role to attain a relationship based on mutual servanthood. Mutual servanthood entails a working partnership in the marriage with an

⁹²Personal interview: 4-30-98, 2:30pm

underwriting understanding of biblical hierarchy which places the man at the head of decision making. In the last ten years, there have been groups formed on the basis of this topic alone. These groups with “equally high views of scripture” have adopted opposing views of the interpretation and actions based on that of scripture.⁹³ The validity of these two groups in the Christian community promotes the PK message as a type of “projective test”, a man attending can take what he wants from statements such as the following by Tony Evans. He writes,

...Sit down with your wife and say something like this: “Honey, I’ve made a terrible mistake. I’ve given you my role. I gave up leading this family, and I forced you to take my place. Now I must reclaim that role.... I’m not suggesting you ask for your role back, I’m urging you to take it back...there can be no compromise here, If you’re going to lead you must lead...Treat the lady gently and lovingly. But lead! ⁹⁴

Aside from the statements which seem to support the submissive role for women in PK households, there is not many other sources where observable sexism is defended. In most other reports on PK gatherings and literature, there is a definitive approval of what the organization is doing for men in America. Donna Minkowitz, who writes for Ms. magazine, attended a rally in Florida. She reports that,

....men were urged to show their emotions, to let go of there anger, re-evaluate how they treat women in their lives, Six or eight of the major speakers emphasize that men’s fear of being seen as weak or unimportant ---in effect, their fear of

⁹³ The two organizations are Christians for Biblical Equality and the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, both evangelical grassroots groups. VanLeewuen 1997:14

⁹⁴ Evans 1994:75

being equated with women ---can become a terrible obstacle in all their relationships.⁹⁵

There have been many references to submission in earlier PK rhetoric. In a speech by Tony Brown, he states that wives must submit for “the survival of our culture.”, he is convinced that “...the primary cause of this national crisis is the feminization of the American male.”⁹⁶ Another quote which supports submission is stated by Bill Bright; “...wives should be treated with love and respect and included in decision making, but the man is the head of the household and women are responders.”⁹⁷ The scripture which supports this ideal is from Ephesians 5:22-23; it reads “Wives , submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church.”⁹⁸ Submission references are one way to define what PK followers are not: that is, women. Submission can be defined in many ways. One informant shared with me a version of the above scripture. He says that God never intended this statement to be taken as men “bossing” women around; rather it’s intended to mean that Jesus sacrificed and died for his followers, just as the husband would also sacrifice and die for his family.

Tony Brown, a PK speaker contends that there is a confusion about contemporary masculinity. He states that this “misunderstanding” has created a nation of “sissified” men who abdicate their role as spiritually pure leaders, thus forcing women to fill the vacuum.”⁹⁹ Their new, or recycled definition of masculinity rethinks where manhood can take a nation of godly men: to become “godly influences” in their community. In response to opposition from scholars, women’s organizations and church

⁹⁵ Minkowitz 1995:67-68

⁹⁶ Quoted from Swomley 1996:2

⁹⁷ Clarkson 1997:191

⁹⁸ Crews 1998:96

⁹⁹ Quoted from Swomley 1996:2

leaders by July of 1996, PK organization deliberately stopped using blatantly sexist language, phrases which encouraged women to “submit” to their husband.¹⁰⁰

The PK organizations unanticipated need for a clear definition of masculinity is occurring “... in a society where both men’s power and rigid gender definitions are being challenged.”¹⁰¹ The question is how can an organization question the meaning of masculinity without questioning other issues of gender such as gender inequality. This issue is not talked about, written about or included in the seven promises of a PK. For Promise Keepers, gender inequality is the natural social order. The concerns brought up by groups who oppose this ‘natural’ hierarchy are legitimate areas for further study and discourses.

Racial ‘reconciliation’ is discussed as an inequality which has to be repaired, but women’s inequality is not addressed. It is only addressed by defining it as fundamental to the bible. Maybe it is a case of only addressing men, including men of color because the PK leaders do not live with inequality. PK men are not marginalized by their sex, so they do not see it as a “mechanism for their privilege”¹⁰² They are only privy to knowledge about being oppressed by discourse from men, such as men of color, who are around them. Maybe PK does not see gender relations as a category of need because they are not “painful in daily life.”¹⁰³

In order to encourage these men to be social actors in their worlds and accountable for their actions in this world, PK promotes tools which enable men to define themselves and their goals. PK promotes, above all else, relationships with men. PK men go to rally’s with their fathers, sons, or fellow church members. They are encouraged to commit to accountability group which foster deep emotional relationships

¹⁰⁰ Conason, Ross and Cokorinos 1996:14

¹⁰¹ Van Leeuwen 1997:5

¹⁰² Ed. Kimmel and Messner 1992:1

¹⁰³ Ed. Kimmel and Messner 1992:3

with their fellow PK members. Rebecca and Douglas Groothuis discuss the fact that the PK organization has evolved so abruptly that PK heads have given an insufficient amount of time to the organization's basic opinion on gender relations,

Much is assumed and very little is discussed or debated when it comes to such questions as the validity and meaning of the concept of masculinity, how (or even if) a godly man's behavior is distinguishable from a godly women's behavior, and how women fit into the 'masculine' Christianity being promoted by PK. ¹⁰⁴

Promise Keeper Masculinity

Masculinity, as described in PK literature and other discourses is a complex combination of characteristics which center around their firm belief in their religion and their role in the "post modern" family unit. PK masculinity is a modified definition of "traditional" characteristics. These "traditional" characteristics will be discussed later in this section. PK definition of masculinity is formed by encouraging characteristics in their followers which include: non-materialistic living, involved child rearing, mutual submission including a male "servant leader" and a female "servant helper", intimate relationships with family members, mutual decision making in families, and securing intimate friendships with other PK men. PK masculinity is formed from a diverse group of PK leaders, hoping to firm up a place for evangelical men in today's society.

To look at the issues of masculinity for PK men, I drew from many sources on gender and friendship. In the text, *Rethinking Masculinity: Philosophical Explorations in Light of Feminism*, the editors write a brief introduction on why the book was written, stating in part that the book was written "not to uncover the "essence" of maleness but, ...good social philosophy needs to take gender fully into account."¹⁰⁵ I choose to use this

¹⁰⁴ Van Leeuwen 1997:14

¹⁰⁵ Ed. May et al. 1996:x

set of theoretical arguments and essays to explore the issues of masculinity for PK men and their families because it engages men in the process of exploring gender and the men are able to speak for themselves, about themselves.¹⁰⁶ A definition of traditional masculinity is offered by one of the authors. He lists a number of characteristics which signify maleness as opposed to femaleness. These characteristics are relative for the many cultures in America. In general, a man, to be considered a man has to maintain a sampling of the following characteristics:

(heterosexual) sexual prowess, sexual conquest of women, heading a nuclear family, siring children, physical and material competition with other man, independence, behavioral autonomy, rationality, strict emotional control, obsession with success and status, a certain way of walking a certain way of talking, having buddies rather than intimate friends, etc. ¹⁰⁷

These possession of these characteristics can determine how this person defines himself and, sometimes more importantly, how other define him. Masculinity itself has to be “maintained” and guarded, if a person does not hold tight to socially constructed ideals of manhood such as “...strong, and perhaps even aggressive. ...taught to be interested in math and science....discouraged from developing interests or personality traits that are deemed “feminine” ..”¹⁰⁸ it becomes “something else”, which “...is a male without masculinity, ... a body without its essential spirit, a mutation with no specific identity” The traditional categories of gender can affect many other aspects of a persons life. They can control responsibilities, labor roles, child care roles, distribution of resources and opportunities, and “economic status”.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Kimmel 1987,1992, Messner 1992, Hantover 1992, Lehne 1990, Lyman 1992

¹⁰⁷ Ed. May et al. 1996:98

¹⁰⁸Ed. May LaFollette 1996:121

¹⁰⁹Ed. May et al. 1996:97

PK men use the requirement to be masculine in some traditional senses because they are reinventing who they are as a person through gender. The term person, or one's sense of personhood is described as a metaphor by Hopkins, he writes

describing individuals beliefs and how they fit into society, how they fit into the world, who and what they think they are. Personhood is critically linked to the influence of the gender categories under which an individual develops.¹¹⁰

PK men are extracting a few characteristics of traditional masculinity such as “heading a nuclear family” and “siring children” while rejecting many of the traditionally masculine characteristics. PK men reject having “buddy” relationships with men, opting for more intimate relationships. They allow themselves to act vulnerable to foster relationships in their families and with friends. PK men are opposed to consumerism, competition, and emphasis on material worth. All of these characteristics alter these men into an alternative form of manhood, an alternative gender identity.

Promise Keepers and Friendship

Comradeship is the primary, accepted “paradigm of friendship” for American men.¹¹¹ Men are ‘buddies’, ‘pals’ but, rarely intimate friends. Comradeship is based on a generalized other, as opposed to a “...particularized other where consequences matter quite a bit.” Intimate, distinct relationships are far away from an ‘office buddy’ who is strictly a lunch companion or a ‘racket ball buddy’ who you only see once a month for a match.¹¹²

Friendship for American men is socially regimented and strictly enforced. Friendship is defined by examples from sitcoms, sports events, media, and literature. Of course, individual men in America reject this stereotype by forming relationships with

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹¹ Ed. May 1996:79

¹¹² Strickwerda and May. Ed. May et al. 1996:82

other men. PK has betrayed many of the traditional elements of masculine friendship. The concept of intimacy lends insight to the new type of friendship for PK men, which women have modeled since the inception of America. In the past American men have not, in general, lived with the power of friendship. They do not relish in the comforting groupness of intimacy or gain power through discourse between other men. In 1985, after a ten year study of 5,000 American men and women , Michael McGill stated:

to say that men have no intimate friends seems on the surface too harsh...But the data indicate that it is not far from the truth...Their relationships with other men are superficial , even shallow. ¹¹³

The factor which most inhibits men in America from engaging in intimate friendships is the ‘problem of intimacy’, which is supported by homophobia and traditional characteristics of masculinity. Men seem to be afraid to cross the line of socially acceptable behavior. They may be accused of acting like or being a homosexual which in the traditional definition of masculinity, is a transgression. PK have dodged this label through explicit expression of their stance on homosexuality. They do not even entertain this label of homosexual as an option for themselves. This is clear in fundamentalist rhetoric. Since intimacy is no longer a barrier for PK men, they have embraced this element and secured its potential for the organizations followers.]It’s unremarkable that these men can feel wonderful just by allowing themselves to become intimate with another human being. After observing these men become more candid about their feelings, Minkowitz writes, “ I begin to wonder if the key to men not oppressing women is for them to stop oppressing the woman inside [themselves].”¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Ed. May et al. 1996:80

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*

This observation from Minkowitz parallels data from my informants. They were also changed because of the intimate relationships forged after PK events.

PK has made significant progress to help men become comfortable with fostering intimate friendships. They have encouraged men to form a “mutual trust base” through the shared experience of PK rallies and through their belief in Jesus Christ as their savior. They have also created a venue for men to spend time together, allowing for bonds to be formed. These bonds are maintained through the accountability groups which are formed after returning from a PK rally. In the venue of a sports stadium, “manliness is some who assured”, intimacy, touching, and crying is clearly accepted for the PK attendees in the likeness of football teammates patting the “backside of a teammate.”¹¹⁵ It is not clear if this is a stated goal of PK leadership.

After attending a rally and participating in an accountability group, PK men grow to understand their male friends on a deeper level and also take their relationships with their wives to a deeper level after learning the value of intimacy and trust.¹¹⁶ The value of this “new” intimate relationship in the PK men’s lives pours into many aspects of their lives such as work, child care, and family relations. The qualities of trust, bonding, discourse and “self disclosure...” create a “...mutual enclosure in which two selves create a new, inclusive focus of attention, what Aristotle terms, a complete friendship.”¹¹⁷ PK rally’s help men get in touch with their feelings, admitting that they have feelings and that these are not a sign of weakness. They need to be able to identify their feelings so they can communicate them to their friends in accountability groups and in relationships. For an intimate relationship to work, a person must also trust the people they are

¹¹⁵Ed. May et al. 1996:88

¹¹⁶Ed. May et al. 1996:84

¹¹⁷Ed. May et al. 1996:85

becoming vulnerable around. An essay on intimacy describes how sexism has hindered the possibility of intimate friendships for men, the author writes

The influences of our sexist culture make trust difficult for most men....our fear of being really vulnerable , of personally trusting another, has often made close relationships difficult. The cardinal sin for men is to be weak, vulnerable.¹¹⁸

Promise Keeper men set out to search for spiritual healing. Developing an alternative masculinity has aided PK leadership to place PK men in their households and communities as “godly influences”. They encountered a way to develop themselves through intimate relationships where they were challenged to look at themselves, in accountability groups, and begin to value their lives. The men that form an accountability group, are in effect looking at themselves when they discuss each of their own problems. In *Magna Moralia*, a classic text on intimacy, Aristotle writes on the value of intimate friends. He states,

as when we wish to see our own face, we do so by looking into the mirror, in the same way when we wish to know ourselves we can obtain that knowledge by looking at our friend. For the friend is...a second self. ¹¹⁹

In the next section of this paper, I will discuss my informants understanding of these concepts. They will explain, in their own words, how PK characteristics of masculinity have influenced their families, jobs, friendships, and their spiritual connection to their God. The third chapter is divided into sections according to the seven promises of a PK. This helps direct which specific masculinity characteristics have had significant influence on their lives including how they feel this movement has influenced their families.

¹¹⁸Ed. May et al. La Follette 1996:121

¹¹⁹Ed. May et al. 1996:89

CHAPTER 3

Men's Voices

"Life is so very different when you have a good friend. I've seen people without special friends, close friends. Other men, especially. For some reason men don't often make and keep friends. This is a real tragedy, I think, because in a way, without a tight male friend, you never really are able to see yourself. That is because part of shaping ourselves is done by others; and a lot of our shaping comes from that one close friend who is something like us." ¹²⁰

In this chapter the PK men will speak for themselves. In our conversations, the men and I talked about friends, family, work, their congregations, and mentorship. The topics discussed in our interviews reflect the seven promises of a PK member. The seven promises outlined by the PK organization were developed to help men become "godly influences" in their world. They are a guide to become a better friend, a father, a son and a husband. The promises also set boundaries for PK men, they are expected to strive for these standards in every day life. Because the promises attempt to guide the men to become friends and disclose information thus creating common bonds with other men, they form a united Christian brotherhood which taps previously unexplored power. The power is in the form of leadership in the community, leadership in the family and leadership among friends and co-workers.

The *Seven Promises of a PK*, ¹²¹ is a primary resource for men seeking to become involved in PK beyond participation an event such as a stadium rally. These seven promises are the core of PK values and are used in some form in accountability group discussion, rally topics, and supplemental resource material. The publication is offered as

¹²⁰ Mr.Hall quoted from Ed. May et al. 1996:79

¹²¹ Seven Promises of a PK is published by Focus on the Family in 1994, a Christian Coalition affiliate, were previously discussed in the first chapter.

a tool for Christian men to encourage other men and themselves to become “godly” men who will influence the world for their Lord Jesus Christ. Each chapter features a singular promise, which is discussed in several essays. Contributors to the book include Bill Bright, Tony Evans, Luis Palau and Bill McCartney who are leaders of the Christian right.

My third chapter is divided into sections to illustrate how the seven promises influence the lives of the men I interviewed. Each section then illustrates how Montana PK men are using the information from PK organizations and resources to help improve their lives through discourse in the form of accountability group discussion, rally speeches, the Internet and supplemental interdenominational meetings (that also include several accountability groups). Some of these men have saturated their lives with PK resources, events, and ideals. Other men have used the PK promises and information simply to reassess aspects of their lives such as fatherhood, marriage and leadership in the community.

Through discourse analysis, I hope to understand a portion of my informants lives and how PK has changed their lives. I listened to the men talk about their families, telling me stories of specific events which trigger warm memories as well as events which trigger life altering choices and their results. Each family was in transition, many as a direct consequence of PK involvement in the men’s lives. Our interviews were not primarily about PK leadership, we discussed detailed experiences of the men who have chosen to make PK a part of their lives. A fine grain analysis of how a revitalization movement affects its members. The process of interviewing people who are directly influenced by a movement is essential to understand how discourse can alter individual lives. Sitting next to families at church, discussing family responsibilities at their kitchen tables, and following up with conversations on the telephone put me in contact with these men on a personal level which made accessibility to their feelings possible. Our discourse

helps to explain the complex notion of PK masculinity as well as how this has affected the families of the men who participate in this movement

The Seven Promises of the PK

The seven promises of a Promise Keeper focus on aspects of men's lives like family, friends, and work which the PK organization feels are important and relevant to encourage these men to become "godly influences in their world". This last word of the phrase, *world*, is not clearly defined in any resource material available. Some of the men defined it as their local community, others said it was their family, and still others define it as their involvement in the regional PK organization. There is extensive literature by scholars and activists concerned with the future of the PK organization.¹²²

PK men who subscribe to these promises are becoming what PK terms "men of integrity, men who keep their promises."¹²³ The organization considers adherence to the seven promises the beginning of a national revival. Greg, a local PK leader, explains the reason for PK; he states that, "The whole focus of PK is discipleship in men, and in men's ministry and the focus of PK external to the conferences is to enhance men's ministry in churches."¹²⁴ The promises are not meant as an addition to the commandments in the Bible, they are designed to "...guide us toward the life of Christ and to transform us within so that we might see transformation in our homes, among our friends, in our churches, and ultimately in our nation."¹²⁵ These promises guide change by forming a united ideology that advances the potential for acquisition of power. Power in leadership positions from the family to the community.

The guide book chronicles each Promise and explains its rationale. The promises were drawn up by PK staff and board of directors. The book is not only a guide, but a set

¹²² Please see Clarkson 1997, Swomley 1996, Bellant 1995 and VanLeeuwen 1997

¹²³ Ed Janssen 1994:4

¹²⁴ Personal interview 4/98

¹²⁵ Ed. Janssen 1994:9

of “marching orders.”¹²⁶ After the introduction outlines the seven promises and their rationale, it asks the reader “Are you a Christian?” to prime the reader for the rest of the text. The Christian volume instructs the male reader to form an accountability group and to discuss the questions at the end of the chapter in the study guide before reading the next chapter. Opinions vary on the influence of PK in the lives of the men I interviewed. The following informant belongs to a local church in Missoula. Randy sings in the choir and is involved with an outreach program for teenagers in the community. His family is just beginning to grow, he and his wife had a baby in September. Contrary to what the media and the PK literature would have us believe, Randy for example, commented that PK hardly influenced his life at all.

I don’t want to downplay the PK, but it didn’t have a big effect on me as it has had on some people. It was positive, but it didn’t make a life changing thing, It’s just good to be involved in positive things.

Other men were more enthusiastic. Ken, who is a PK leader and also a traveling minister, explains his view on the purpose of PK.

PK is wonderful vehicle for having men in a non threatening way to come to a place of confronting themselves about who they are and needing to have a higher authority than themselves.

Earl, who is whole heartily involved in a supplemental bible study to PK and is also a highly supportive father to his two grown daughters, adds,

These men [PK leaders] were amazing, I mean they achieved great things but, at the expense of their families. Promise Keepers is about balancing your life.

The men who have taken on a leadership position in the PK organization have dramatic stories about how the experience of a rally changed their life. For example, Greg, who is an ambassador in Montana, recalls what happened the night he came home from his first PK rally. He described his attempt to explain to his wife of twenty one

¹²⁶ *ibid.*

years how the stadium event had affected his faith. His emotional response is not unlike the promotional video clips we viewed together depicting men of all backgrounds sobbing, crying and yelling out to their God.

When my wife said “What did you do?”, I just started laughing, then I started crying, that’s how it went for several hours. In a situation like that, all I did was cry, my wife understood that.

A church leader in Montana, who venomously opposes PK stated that PK is a “sissy” organization. He is among the church leaders who hold onto the traditional interpretation of scripture. He believes that women are spiritually unequal and that men should only pursue vital relationships with their spouse, not other men. He exclaims his view on PK.

I do not need PK men telling me how to be a man, God ordained the church to do this.

The majority of PK men told me that PK has been a tool to improve their lives. Aaron, a recovering alcoholic/addict explains how PK has affected his life through the sharing of bible scripture with another PK man.

The most positive outcome was that it strengthened my foundation in Christ, I quit smoking and chewing, on the way over, I was sharing with a guy from our church and told him how the lord had delivered me from drugs and alcohol...he shared a scripture with me...it helped me see that it’s Christ who lives in me, so you might be addicted to nicotine but, you’re dead on the cross and it’s Jesus who lives in you now. He’s never been addicted...learning that scripture has been my stand on some many things, ...that was my strong point, that and meeting brothers in the lord.

The most unexpected response about the PK organization, from a Christian man, was an answer to a question about attending a PK rally. Darrin, who studied philosophy in college and now runs an outreach for youth through his church explains his concerns about the PK movement. He does not consider himself a Promise Keeper because he did not join an accountability group. He instead participates in a couples bible study with other young married people from his church.

I think I was skeptical, I think you can imagine, the Hitler rallies, the emotional impact, you get your emotions up and a slight thing, you can turn it. Getting a lot of men together, it depends on how much you trust the leaders.

A Man and His Word

The first promise of a PK sets the foundation for the rest of the promises. It reads *A Promise Keeper is committed to honoring Jesus Christ through worship, prayer, and obedience to God's Word in the power of the Holy Spirit*. If the man does not believe this promise, then the book suggests that the other promises will not transform his life. Two of the men I interviewed recently became Christians. The rest of the men have been Christian since childhood. The chapter emphasizes the need for men to begin a pattern of worship which includes getting their family ready for services, attending supplemental church activities, singing, praying, and being proud of their church affiliation.

The promise calls for private, personal communications with his God, or prayer. The prayer leads to instruction from their God; the men then carry out whatever the prayer discourse (between the man and his God) has instructed them to do.¹²⁷ It is a type of personal revival, an intimate way to deal with fears, responsibilities, relationships, and choices. The PK book calls for personal revival to “see our own hearts so God can change us...and then improve our homes workplaces, our churches and all of society.”¹²⁸ The author of this essay believes that his “church is in *revival* and that God is about to birth the next great awakening. And it will start with Promise Keepers on their knees in prayer.”¹²⁹ I witnessed prayer upon knees, prayer lying on the floor, prayer through weeping emotional verbal expression and was included in family prayer sitting around the kitchen table. Personal prayer with God was not the only type of prayer in which PK men routinely participated. Family prayer before meals, sleep, work and outings reinforced PK ideals out-loud for the whole family to ingest.

¹²⁷ Ed. Janssen 1994:25-26

¹²⁸ Ed. Janssen 1994:26

¹²⁹ *ibid.*

The author wants PK men's words to conform to God's word, not just a man's word; he describes a PK rally as "a celebration of their manhood under the lordship of Jesus Christ."¹³⁰ Their God's word is a measure of his character, his bond, the expression of his nature, is the sole source of faith and the absolute rule of conduct.¹³¹ This bond equals the truth, the nature of his word and the sanctity of his speech; a PK man's word is the measure of his character. Reverence for God's word is equated with reverence for a PK man's word; they are exalted since they were created in God's image to "Be a man of God's word; Be a man of your own word."¹³² The men I interviewed found this promise essential for every aspect of their lives. When I asked Jim why he decided to attend a PK rally, he stated:

I was hungry for the word. If it had something to do with Jesus I wanted to go...I heard a little about PK...I didn't know what to expect. I wish she (wife) could have gone.

Another of the men articulated that "God's word" is the basis for his family. Aaron talked about how he was lost before he "turned to the Lord". He wanted to bring his family to a community setting with an emphasis on service. He explained that these desires were subconscious, he did not realize that he needed to be a part of a community. Aaron talked about how he used to view the world before he heard "God's word", he expressed it in the following way:

I know for me, I was numb for years to the fact with the way the world was. If it didn't affect me, I didn't care. I didn't realize how much it really did bother me. Families today need to put God first in their lives.

One man explained that the PK interpretation of "God's word" helped him reevaluate his priorities. Derek recalls a memory from the PK rally he attended. He talked about how at one point all sorts of Dads were asked to stand up and be recognized, adoptive dads, divorced dads, new dads. The speaker at this rally encouraged these dads to reevaluate

¹³⁰ Ed. Janssen 1994:33

¹³¹ Ed Janssen 1994:35

¹³² *ibid.* 1994:39

how they are spending time with their children. Darrin, for example, reevaluated his role as a father, emphasizing his work schedule.

...it's given me a framework to understand one of my roles. I think a lot of people are workaholics and that it's so important what you are doing, you have to get things done. It's given me permission to say you know I'm going to spend more time with my family and set some boundaries.

The next section talks about personal relationships supported by a traditional mentor definition of friendship. Boundaries are structured and expected because the men are instructed by PK training's to seek out certain types of mentor relationships and are encouraged to attain specific goals during these meetings.

Mentorship

The second promise of a PK teaches men how to become a good friend and what these relationships can offer his life. The promise reads: *A Promise Keeper is committed to pursuing vital relationships with a few other men, understanding that he needs brothers to help him keep his promises.* The PK organization defines mentoring as a process in which men who are more mature help those who are less mature. The objective of mentoring for PK is to ensure that their Lord, Jesus Christ, will be a part of people's lives in the future. PK consider it a form of ministry: one man at a time, helping each other learn and grow. They feel mentoring is of paramount importance because there are so few male leaders in churches today who are not clergy, ministers or other types of formal church leaders. PK also see mentoring as a form of ministry in the home, so boys can be around their mentors. Howard Hendricks, the author of the essay on mentoring feels that "...there is a terrifying void of affirming maleness in our society".¹³³

¹³³ Ed. Janssen 1994:50

Mentoring is divided into three types of relationships that the PK organization want men to bring into their lives. One is an older man, one a “soul brother”, and the last is a younger man to affirm and encourage. The mentoring structure promotes friendship by stating specific examples of how to be a friend, develop a relationship, and perpetuate these relationships. This definition of friendship masks the fact that mentoring is used as an instrument to facilitate intimate friendships without the uncomfortable inferences and definitions of what an intimate relationship can potentially mean. This gives Promise Keeper friendships legitimacy, purpose and safety. PK men are safely protected from promoting intimacy of a sexual nature. They are protected because of fundamentalist ideals which are adamantly against homosexual lifeways. Also, Biblical verses are interpreted literally, supporting homophobia through historic literature. PK leaders are outspoken politically, promoting anti-homosexual rhetoric through literature and speeches.

The author is well aware of the ‘macho man’ stereotype with which many of the PK men grew up: men were encouraged to be self-reliant, unfeeling, anti touching, too competitive, and macho. He then describes the “so-called new man”, as sensitive, caring, noncompetitive and able to “enjoy a deep and meaningful, non sexual relationship with another man?”¹³⁴ The scripture, Luke 6:31, mandates that men seek mentor relationships. This is a safe environment to promote intimate relationships among men without the threat of seeming “like a woman”, or a “homosexual”.

This promise encourages men to admit that they need other men in their lives, to affirm themselves, acknowledging that “..two men can make a positive impact on their respective lives, ministries, and families.”¹³⁵ Pairs of mentors are encouraged to join together and form an accountability group. A sizable part of the chapter is devoted to

¹³⁴ Ed. Janssen 1994:58

¹³⁵ Ed. Janssen 1994:62

teaching men how to confront conflict constructively, and how to be a friend, something that the leaders feel the men do not already understand.

Mentoring, including accountability groups are positive aspects of PK for the men I interviewed. Aaron talked about his experience after he attended a PK rally. He explained that he continues to be a part of an accountability group because it helps him discuss and solve like problems the men in his group are facing.

...[PK] really recommended highly to get an accountability group, and on the way home, ...we started an accountability group...we were doing it because we all recognized that we had problems in our lives, we wanted to come and tell other men where we were.

Like Aaron, Bryan views his accountability group as a support system which reminds him of the energy he felt at the PK rally.

The biggest thing was traveling over there, we drove over there as a group, getting closer to another couple of guys was sort of making a commitment with each other to say, hey, let's not lose this. After we get back to keep encouraging each other, getting closer to each other.

During accountability group discussion, men participate in sharing their needs, fears, problems and successes. A PK ambassador for Montana explains that in his accountability group men use their relationships with other men to strengthen other aspects of their lives. Earl admits that he needs help, in the form of male relationships, to strengthen other relationships in this life. When I asked Earl about his accountability group, he immediately connected the meetings with the relationship advice found in the book, *Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper*.

We talk about grandparenting, and also the pain and hurt that men are struggling with in their home or struggling with in their relationships, even in their church relationships. The 'one to one' helps with practical solutions, giving tools to use, how to deal with those conflicts.

A few of the men talked about the mentors in their lives. Aaron discussed the man he actively mentors in great detail. He explained that this “type” of man would not have been a part of his life in the past. Aaron said he would not have given him a chance to be a positive aspect of his worship in the past but, he now understands that their relationship follows his Lord’s plan to actively minister, committing men one at a time.

He’s 65 years old. He’s very poor and has served some time. I take him to church with us every Sunday, morning and night, and also on Saturday. We’ve been taking him for 4 or 5 months. Now he’s on fire with the lord. He’s a real blessing to me.

Other men do not fully participate in mentor relationships. Bryan wants to become a mentor but, is only involved in an accountability group at this time.

I think it’s a neat aspect and I’d like to explore that some more. There are some parenting issues and things that I’d like to ask the other guys who have teenagers, and I’d like to ask them how do they do this, give me some ideas.

PK men who participate in accountability groups, find these meetings a format for discourse. Discourse among the men encourages the formation of shared concerns and ideas. Through a combined beliefs, these men become active participants in their own lives. The men began to talk with other men, a concept which has not been a part of traditional masculinity. They also begin to participate in activities which strengthen their families. For example, PK families begin eating together, or going to church as a group. In their accountability groups, the men discover they have similar problems, weaknesses, and struggles. Through this realization, PK men become a collective providing support. They become a group of men who are struggling to improve their lives. They are able to express their fears, needs, desires, problems, hopes and do not feel threatened because they are backed up by the scripture from their bible.

Men of Integrity

This next chapter of the guide defines a spiritually pure man according to the PK leadership. The third promise reads: A Promise Keeper is committed to practicing

spiritual, moral, ethical, and sexual purity. It proclaims that the characteristics of a spiritually pure man affects his actions, creating integrity. This integrity helps him choose the “...right thing as opposed to the easy thing.”¹³⁶ In the first essay in this section, Tony Evans states that integrity is equated with a PK role as a man. He is expected to become the spiritual leader of the household, if he is not already. Evans feels that the role of men has been abdicated to women creating a nation of “sissified” men who force women to fill the position of spiritual head of the household. He states “If the men don’t do it, *someone* must.”¹³⁷ Evans encourages men to assume their responsibilities and “...take back the reins of spiritually pure leadership God intended us to hold”.¹³⁸ He defines a spiritually pure man as someone who passes on Christianity, raises kids, “the more the better”, and demand or earn respect from everyone in your life. Becoming a man of justice, mercy, and stability, and wisdom.

In the section entitled ‘Reclaiming your Manhood’, PK men are expected to sit down with their wives and say “Honey I’ve made a terrible mistake, I’ve given you my role. I gave up leading this family, and I forced you to take my place. Now I must reclaim that role.”¹³⁹ He then encourages the “ladies” to “Give it [leadership role in the family] back, for the sake and survival of our culture, let your man be man if he’s willing.”¹⁴⁰ Promise Keeper men are reasserting a traditional manhood which is supported by their Bible through fundamentalist doctrine.

Another aspect of becoming a man is spiritual and sexual purity a process; a PK man cannot become pure overnight. He is encouraged to pray first thing in the morning, to stay away from unhealthy temptations, to have spiritually pure thoughts, and actions.

¹³⁶ Ed. Janssen 1994:71

¹³⁷ Ed. Janssen 1994:74

¹³⁸ Ed. Janssen 1996:75

¹³⁹ Ed. Janssen 1994:79

¹⁴⁰ Ed. Janssen 1994:80

The last section deals with sexual purity, how to attain and live up to God's standards of behavior. Pure behavior reflects their God's character and presence in their lives.¹⁴¹

The PK men attest to making spiritual purity a part of their lives, but do not adopt related gender roles in their household. I expected to find that most of the men whom I interviewed consider themselves the head of the household. I was surprised to learn that some of the men and their wives seek equality in their households. Three of the ten men I spoke with talked about equality in their marriages. Marriage, for these three particular informants, is an equality of the spirit, emotions, and decisions. It is not necessarily an equality of actions, responsibilities, and opportunities. The wives were responsible for the primary childcare, cleaning, and cooking. The PK men took care of other tasks around the house such as outside work and bill paying. Darrin explains his perspective on gender and the PK organization. PK has given him some insight into the unanswered questions surrounding gender roles in America today.

...there was a lack of self consciousness about what it meant to be masculine or maybe unspoken rules. Then the feminist movement arose and there was some criticism of those traditional masculine roles, so men, at least the ones that were listening were quick to give up some of those things. Now, I think there is a swing back to recover some of the positive ideas about...it's almost a need for identity more then power or any of the other things.

Darrin goes on to explain how Christian doctrine can fit into contemporary heterosexual relationships. As he sees it, the scripture which talks about hierarchy in the family is misunderstood by most people.

...If you impact the full analogy, Christ is the head of the church by dying for the church, not by bossing it around. So if there is a concept of headship in that way, which I would be willing to grant, it would be such a counter culture understanding that to fill it with our common concepts of leadership and hierarchy would probably misuse it. ...Maybe there is a headship in our family, but, I don't

¹⁴¹ Ed. Janssen 1994:92

think you would be able to discover, or I would be able to discover, it's certainly not what the world would notice.

Randy, a new father, discussed his relationship with his wife. He came to Promise Keepers because both of his brothers had attended a conference and offered to pay his way. Randy commented that he and his wife make an effort to check in with each other to discuss things that are happening in their lives. When I asked him about his relationship with his wife before they were married, he offered this statement.

We talked about wanting our decisions to be equal, we even did some marital counseling, which I'd recommend to anyone.

Contrary to Randy's response, Earl explains his view of the scripture which governs gender roles according to biblical values. He explained that this identity is fundamental to the stability of a family. When asked how fundamentalism relates to PK information and resources.

..when you say fundamentalism, do you mean getting back to the bible? ...the organization that my wife and I are involved in is based on the exact same principles as the PK, just straight out of the bible. The bible is fairly simple about it, it says God, Jesus Christ, Man, Woman. And submission in that order, and if a man is pushed out of that then the whole thing falls apart.

One PK man explained that a man of integrity has clear priorities. Greg felt that his priorities reflect what his God wants in his life. He gave explicit examples of what he felt were not aspects of a man with integrity.

Focusing on the family and focusing on life without being distracted by all the other important things. Material things. Trying to define yourself as 'Oh, I feel like such a schmuck because I'm not successful because I didn't stay with the company for 40 years....I think there is a big focus on success, and what is a success, a success in life, material things, those aren't particularly important.

Integrity, as Promise Keepers have defined and used this term, can be an acknowledgment of vulnerability to men outside of PK. The men attended a rally and learned how to open themselves up enough to become a friend. An intimate friendship,

like the ones promoted by PK, are not a widely accepted. Earl explains what he considers to be a man of integrity.

I think the spirit of men who got together to worship and praise, men who were really willing to humble themselves and be broken and acknowledged or deal with their pride, pain. It [*PK rally*] was a safe place to do it.

Talking about the PK men's children demonstrated how much these men believe in family. The men were excited to discuss their sons and daughters, insisting that everything is well because as Earl states "they are Christians". Bryan discusses what types of characteristics he would like his son to have. Contrary to popular stereotype, Bryan does not want his son to exemplify many of the traditional aspects of masculinity.

I want him to be a Christian, I want him to be a person of integrity, honesty, the kind of person that doesn't hide a lot of things from other people, pretty open. A gentle person.

My informants masculinity is partially emotional, it does not exclusively value material wealth. Some of my informants are living in lower economic brackets, however, they do not consider this an illustration of their worth as a person. PK literature and other discourses support this idea. The men talked repeatedly about material worth and materialism as a major problem of American families. Materialism leads them to attain an acceptable economic level which takes them away from their families and other relationships. The men define a masculine man as one who is accountable, emotional, humble, has values, and communicates and one who has vital relationships with the people that he cares about in his life. The men who do not have good relationships with their fathers are consistently working on changing that situation. These relationships were failing because the fathers and sons could not find common ground to support communication.

The bible clearly places the sexes in a hierarchy. The roles and responsibilities are socially defined for PK families supporting certain activities for males and females.

Related to gender, concepts of inequality and hierarchy help to understand PK gender issues. Inequality is an injustice or disproportional amounts of rights and responsibilities. Hierarchy, however, is a “system of persons ranked above one another”¹⁴² such as in a family. Because PK families are set up in a hierarchy, the people involved are ranked, thus unequal in status. This hierarchy supports gender inequality in families. PK families are based on hierarchy according to the Bible. Families without a male head of the household are thought to be the source of societal problems. Gender inequality is not discussed in PK doctrine because it “doesn’t affect” the men who are following this organization. Gender is something which is viewed as sanctified or “naturally” hierarchical because of the doctrine which is followed.

Family and Fatherhood

The fourth promise covers a broad range of issues about family including relationships with their wives, children and fathers. It reads: *A Promise Keeper is committed to building strong marriages and families through love, protection, and biblical values.* Gary Smalley, the author of the essay, encourages men to define their expectations, to commit to communication, to become involved in small group or family group support and deal with their baggage while learning how to compensate for any problems.¹⁴³ Fathering is a priority. One of the main objectives is to get the kids to have a Christian faith, evangelize their children.

The following quotes exemplify how PK view fatherhood. Most men describe their role as a father as one of the most important ones. They also want to pass on biblical values to their children. The PK ideal of fatherhood and other family relationships are consistent with what the men expressed in our interviews. Charles, for

¹⁴² Webster’s Dictionary, second edition. 1996:Random House

¹⁴³ Ed. Janssen 1994:107 Seven Promises of a Promise Keeper

example, talked about how he remembers a PK speaker expressing his views on fatherhood.

..if a man went there and was shirking his responsibilities they would tell it like it is. They tell fathers this is the most responsible part of your life, love them, be a part of it. You don't have long to do it.

Bryan expresses another example of how a speaker at a rally relays a message encouraging PK men to constantly evaluate their behavior around their children.

..think about when you are spending time with your family are you really spending time there, are you really there...I have to make conscious effort sometimes, you do stuff you are wondering about other things.

Family is a paramount issue for the PK organization. Even single men are encouraged to participate by attending rallies with their fathers, brothers or other church members. All the promises are linked to this value in some form. In our interviews we discussed their parents marriages, their own marriages and family life for them now and in the past. PK men's relationships with their wives are structured around an ideal of the man as a servant leader and the women as the servant helper. In three cases younger couples deliberately attempted to achieve equality in their relationship. Most of the men agree with the following statement (one of the principal complaints of many PK leaders).

We figured out that we were not the spiritual heads of our households. The wives had been doing it for so many years. We were not being responsible. The wives were very inspirational in getting us to begin this journey.

Contrary to defining the man as spiritual head of the household, the 3 younger men follow a more equal arrangement. Randy describes how he and his wife make decisions in their family.

...the way we've done it is whoever has the clearer vision will lead. I agree with the idea that any given division you probably need someone who is going to take ownership...in a good functioning relationship, it would be hard to tell who is the

leader, because the listening is so intentional....We have a real teamwork concept, it was different in her family growing up, probably more like my family, now.

Aaron, who recently converted to serving his God, not only labeling himself a Christian, explained what the PK speakers at the rally made him realize. He and his wife have come close to divorce many times in the past. His family was falling apart from drugs and alcohol. He considers the PK and his church activities to be his “program” which keeps him from substance abuse. In our interview Aaron begins to cry as he explains why this pattern has changed forever.

We talk now, he gave me a wife that is my best friend. That I had all these years but, I never really realized. I guess the world just stole my joy.... We sit down and discuss everything now, we are a family...There is a real unity, it's all because of the Lord. It's nothing that we've done.

“Servant leadership” is a concept that is constantly surfacing in our interviews. Earl attempts to explain this concept after being asked what the major concerns of families are in the United States. He chronicles the contradictions and characteristics which are suppose to exemplify a servant leader.

The major concerns of families are men needing to take responsibility in a love leadership. Not a dominating, controlling, lording it over, but as a servant. Learning to serve their families through compassion, love and caring and also firmness. ..it's not without the kind of biblical discipline that is needed in the family. I think it's bringing more balance back into the family. Men have abdicated their role, just throwing their money on the table...meekness has strength to it, it's strength under control, it's a different kind of power.

Consistent with the stereotype of a “nuclear family, Jennifer and Bryan seem to accept the responsibilities and opportunities for men and women in a traditional household. Bryan works outside the home and takes care of outside the house duties. Jennifer works within the home taking care of the children and the household. They conflict with the traditional household gender stereotypes because one of the couple (Bryan) perceives their relationship as being equal. This idea of a “partnership” in spousal relationships

define many of my informants families. The PK leadership encourages a partnership type relationship but, does not offer any solutions to correct unequal domestic responsibilities.

Bryan, in the following statement, explains the paradox in many Promise Keeper families.

I would not feel threatened if my wife wanted to work, I'm glad she doesn't because she stays home with the kids and does a wonderful job. I don't see that defining who I am in the family, being the breadwinner. It's not a central part of my role.... I feel like Jennifer and I are very much a partnership...we just have different roles, she does the laundry, I always mow the lawn, work is split up differently but, it's even.

Church Involvement

Encouragement for pastors is essential, PK literature insists, because pastors are not consistently supported. The promise advocates PK men supporting their pastors financially, spiritually and through activism in the church. It reads "A Promise Keeper is committed to supporting the mission of his church by honoring and praying for his pastor, and by actively giving his time and resources". A pastor wrote an essay in which described how he felt when his congregation encouraged him with a telegram on a particularly stressful day for him. He also talked about how PK men should start a group or a schedule where people would honor, pray for their pastor on a given day. They could also organize a group who prays for the pastor before he goes out to minister before a service so he feels affirmed and energized. The author, Dale Schlafer claims that this will change the whole dynamic of their church because it gives the men a sense of ownership.

H.B London, Jr., a church leader discussed in the PK guide, writes about how he never wants to be the leader of a church which is controlled by ladies, "...in most cases, the consequences will be painful" ¹⁴⁴ If a church doesn't have strong male leadership, this is not the ladies fault London believes, but, he thinks men have abdicated their

¹⁴⁴ Ed. Janssen 1994:142

leadership role as the head of the house. London encourages a balance of leadership in the church, he also tried to talk with men to find out their real needs through discourse. He wants men to be generous, prayerful, devoted to Jesus Christ, teachable, steadfast, have integrity, have a thirst for knowledge and be a good friend.¹⁴⁵ He encourages men to build the church up for Jesus Christ.

Montana men, who label themselves PK belong to Bible believing churches, attend worship service regularly and maintain Christian lifestyles. The other men who have attended a PK rally but, do not consider themselves PK official members do not always attend fundamentalist churches. All the men give income, attend services, are involved in some type of Bible studies and are active in their churches.

A retired business leader in Montana explains why he supports the PK movement and specifically the chance to support men's ministry in churches. As he sees it, the churches need help creating a sustainable men's ministry.

I think that the church was not doing enough for men. The Sunday school is just not enough. It's not revived as well, and I'm not sure why, maybe were too busy. But, being too busy for the lord is bad business.

A local PK leader agrees, Greg views his involvement with PK as a way to support his church. He has organized a group of men who attend a "Men of Integrity" meeting on Monday evenings. Men from various congregations gather to worship, discuss PK events, mentor, and facilitate education seminars with the training he receives from the PK organization.

It's really been refocused to really work on the men's ministry in your own church and then once you have that to a vital type of situation then you can go out and talk about helping somewhere else.

¹⁴⁵ Ed. Janssen 1994:147

Aaron supports his church in a more direct fashion. He is a co-facilitator of a 12 step program in his congregation. He is also involved with the preparation of the services, attending every service offered throughout the week. Aaron views all of his church activities as a “program” which keeps him sober.

Denominational Unification and Racial Reconciliation

The sixth promise reads: *A Promise Keeper is committed to reaching beyond any racial and denominational barriers to demonstrate the power of Biblical unity.* PK men in Montana, however, face an obstacle to promise racial reconciliation because of the lack of minorities in their state. The denominational variation is limited to anyone who considers himself in the “Body of Christ” ¹⁴⁶ Coach McCartney shares stories of how he witnessed racial hatred, injustice and would like to see his Christian brothers take this issue seriously. At this time, he also lives in a city where there is an overwhelming majority of Anglo inhabitants. In Montana there is a high percentage of Anglo inhabitants, around 93% according to the 1990 census. This puts the minority population of Montana at around 7%, with only .3% African American. PK men in Montana do not have the opportunity to participate in Coach McCartney’s racial reconciliation. Native American men, who are a minority population in Montana, are not a group which is represented in the Montana Promise Keepers.

He calls for racial reconciliation as a Biblical issue. A united Christian brotherhood has no room for divisions according to McCartney’s understanding. He believes racism is “Satan’s stronghold for ...breeding hatred and undermining the work of the church” ¹⁴⁷ He believes it’s about time “...Christians repented for the sin of racism”, he wants people to stop “staying silent, acting with, at best, only token resistance.” ¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Ed. Janssen 1994:155

¹⁴⁷ Ed. Janssen 1994:161

¹⁴⁸ Ed. Janssen 1994:163

McCartney encourages men to value other peoples history and experiences. He invites PK men to pray and pursue vital relationships with men of different denominational and racial backgrounds. In the next essay about the seventh promise, authors Philip Porter and Gordon England propose that PK men seek repentance as an action, men should seek relationships and choose to “acknowledge the reality of historic sin and the ongoing existence of prejudice in every ethnic group.”¹⁴⁹

Two contributors to the PK guide propose that men link up with men of a different ethnicity and attempt to forge a relationship: repenting to each other, and meeting on a regular basis. Montana men do not have the opportunity to engage in various ethnic relationships because of the demographics of the state. Men in Montana do, however, have a strong will to come together across denominational boundaries. PK men in Montana seemed to value their involvement with diverse men at the PK rallies which they attended. Most of the men commented on the wide range of men who congregated for these events. A unified bond was formed at the events because the men were all there to worship their Lord Jesus Christ. Aaron views the diversity as a supportive network.

We come from so many different backgrounds, I looked around and it's different ages, income brackets, different everything. Different ways we were brought up but, we were all there for the same thing, just a real unity...people coming to hear the word of God. Just a unity and growing in who I am through him.

Greg agrees with Aaron, stressing the need for men's ministry. He did not comment, as many of my informants did not, about racial reconciliation. Racial reconciliation is not a conceivable option for many men in Montana. In Greg's view, fundamentalism is open to all denominations. This view is not consistent with many denominations.

¹⁴⁹ Ed. Janssen 1994:171

You have guys from every denomination conceivable, Christian or not that are going. Then they go back to their church and you could write another term paper on men's ministry in church because some churches don't have them.

Charles, who conducts independent ministry, is thrilled about being a combination of denominations. He grew up in a Jewish family and then began to explore Christianity. He considers himself a Christian who practices Jewish as well as the Christian faith. Charles expressed that growing up with a diverse background has helped him to be more understanding of people's feelings and thoughts on their personal faith.

There's an opening to acknowledge that there are Jewish believers that have a walk of faith that men be different ...it's bridging some understanding between Jewish and gentile believers which is healthy, it's okay to walk together....I'm an enigma because I'm a Jewish believer and I sort of know where I fit because I relate to both charismatic and fundamentals.

Relationships with other men are of paramount importance. These relationships can be with friends, brothers, fathers, sons, pastors, elders, or young men. PK affects each man differently. Some men were greatly influenced; others merely took the information from the PK rally and did not commit to an accountability group, nor any future rallies. Some of the men claim to have learned the importance of communication and friendship at the PK rally.

They tell me how their lives have changed since they learned how to communicate with their friends and their wives. Specifically, they tell me how their business is booming because they are able to talk out their problems from work at the PK meetings. The main form of communication for self improvement and relationship improvement is in the accountability groups. The men also seek male friends to mentor which promotes discourse, counseling, support and encouragement as well as accountability for their actions and thoughts. Friendship is an untapped resource for most men in America

The seventh promise reads: A man and his world: A Promise Keeper is committed to influencing his world, being obedient to the Great Commandment (see Mark 12:30-31) and the Great Commission (see Matt 28:19-0) These two passages in the bible are the centerpiece for PK strength. They offer a solid foundation to work the other seven promises out. The first passage illustrates how people can love as their God loves. They can love by faith, not necessarily “because of” but, “in spite of” ¹⁵⁰ It puts the action of loving above the actions of the person being loved. A person acting poorly is still eligible for “Agaape” love, or supernatural, sacrificial love. The second passage which is a part of this promise, the great commission, is about a PK personal involvement in evangelism. The promise encourages men to influence in a godly way his family, friends, those who are apart from their God, Jesus Christ.

They see it as “a matter of obedience” to Jesus Christ ¹⁵¹ They applaud men who are proud of the fact that they are Christian men, willing to share the message with other people. The author, Luis Palau, asks men to learn more about those who are outside their Christ, even people who’re “not so nice”. The author would like to see PK men at the front of the pack when Christians fulfill the great commission and evangelize the world. “Mass communications have made it possible to reach even “closed” countries with the message of life.” ¹⁵² Trying to get men to want to save the unsaved with boldness.

Discussing the characteristics he would like his son to have, Aaron emphasizes his desire for his son to be able to love other people even if they are acting unlovable. PK men are encouraged to stand against the stereotypes for masculinity by acting in a contrary fashion.

¹⁵⁰ Ed. Janssen 1994:186

¹⁵¹ Ed. Janssen 1994:194

¹⁵² Ed. Janssen 1994:201

I want him to turn his cheek, people are going to come up to you and slap you in the face for no reason, could be verbally. I don't want him to lash back out. I want him to turn his cheek and love these people ...the best way I can do that is to love him and treat him the way I want him to be. We've always been close and together, I take him with me everywhere I go.

For most of the men, an option to love by faith creates an opportunity to befriend men who are not involved with Promise Keepers. At local PK meetings, Earl is exposed to men of diverse denominations. As he sees it, he is meeting men who are also working toward acquisition of power to influence their community.

I think it's allowed men to mix, men that go to different churches but work together maybe at the same company to be able to open up doors for that kind of fellowship in the workplace, ...it has also allowed me more interdenominational relationships to develop so that they can rally against things that are not just denominationally oriented but, are family oriented.

Evangelicalism begins for the PK men at their stadium events. In the following statement, Greg describes the format for PK evangelicalism. He explains, in this example, what PK men are expected to accomplish after attending a PK conference. This evangelicalism is turned into a part of life.

There's always an altar call at the beginning of the conference, to go for the hearts. Getting people to admit their situation and be saved if that's the situation. They do it right up front (PK leaders) not at the end. I work with the task force that organized the PK meeting here a year ago in January where we had about 700 men at the university.

Placing evangelical service in a hierarchy ensures that PK men will deal with their households first, or simultaneously with their congregations.

It's actually to take it back into the church place of fellowship. Obviously their homes are the place of ministry, the place of responsibility is in the home and then their church, and then in their community.

Many of the men took a chance with me, and let me into their lives through faith. The Promise Keeper men I interviewed taught me about family, sacrifice, and organizing priorities. Most of these men made a conscious attempt to evangelize me at every opportunity. They wanted to discuss my faith, my beliefs and explained that they could bring me “to the lord”. This behavior is an example of the grassroots activism which the PK organization is encouraging in its membership. Through discourse with men at the PK events and with people in the public, these men are fulfilling the Great Commission. This begins with their family, extends throughout their communities and has the potential to infiltrate America.¹⁵³

The actions of most of the men I talked with are consistent with PK ideals, however, some of the men are consciously attempting to develop a more “equal relationship” with their wives. The PK men are gaining confidence to develop relationships because of the information provided by Promise Keepers organization. The PK men are learning how to become good friends through accountability groups and PK literature. These men are meeting in their accountability groups to discuss their problems and achievements which creates a group ideology. This ideology has the potential to encourage men to attain positions of power in their communities and families because PK men can count on each other for support and encouragement to achieve their goals.

¹⁵³ Please see Frederick Clarkson, *Eternal Hostilities* 1997

CONCLUSION

The historical success of PK is deteriorating. Funding is coming to the organization solely through donations and merchandise sales. Men interested in the conferences can currently attend for no charge. Even with free admission, men are not showing up (even if already registered) in the enormous numbers as documented in 1996 and 1997. PK attendance has dropped to nearly half of anticipated attendance in several of the stadium events in Michigan and Los Angeles. In Little Rock, Arkansas, PK brought in most of the men who signed up for the event but, only filled a fifth of the stadium's capacity according to a recent article in TIME magazine.¹⁵⁴ Dale Schlafer told TIME that the future of PK is in jeopardy if the attendance keeps decreasing and the organization keeps adding up debt. McCartney, on the other hand, sees a bright future for the organization. He thinks of the organization as parallel to a football program that is experiencing a low point. If the organization keeps falling into further debt, it will eventually turn into an annual event, a type of revival. Local accountability groups will transform into men's bible studies because resources will diminish. The men will no longer be able to use PK literature. Also, PK men will no longer attend stadium rallies where they rejuvenate their masculine presence.

In conclusion, the Promise Keeper movement is altering the lives of many families in the United States. New roles for both men and women have been created by powerful discourse among leaders and followers stimulating changes in PK families. These families are creating a new definition of family and gender by shifting roles and responsibilities within the households. For example, men may be contributing more to childcare but, less to household chores. A PK man can adapt behavior to their

¹⁵⁴ Labi 1998:63

interpretation of a masculine role, carefully assessing their behavior so as not to cross into homosexual or “sissified” actions.

Current financial problems could dissipate the energy of the PK movement. The men who have attended stadium events no longer need to attend conferences to adhere to the seven promises. The men who embrace the seven promises of a PK are negotiating a new place within their families and communities as leaders. By exploring intimate friendships with other men, PK followers reevaluate their priorities. Jesus Christ, family, friends and church become top priorities after committing to the seven promises of a Promise Keeper. PK men, also claim leadership in their households and seek positions of leadership in their churches and local government. Traditionally, men have equated power with guarded emotions. Conversely, PK men embrace vulnerability and intimate relationships. Promise Keepers has convinced many men that intimacy and communication are powerful tools and essential to building strong families and relationships.

My fieldwork describes a small population of men who have attended PK rallies. The larger population of PK men in America is more diverse. A similar study of men from another PK population, in a different state perhaps, would be helpful to compare and contrast Montana PK men’s experiences. Hearing directly from the men through their own words offered an interesting insight into their experience with the PK movement. My study was, however, limited because I did not interview enough PK men to assess the movements impact in depth. I also was unable to gather interviews from around the state of Montana, which would have surely made a difference because of lifeways, economics, and population size in cities. Searching out minority men in Montana who consider themselves PK is something that I should have concentrated on more intently. I had a hard time locating a diverse population within the PK circle of men who I worked with on this project.

Theoretically, an alternative definition of masculinity was drawn from PK men's experiences and my own observations. Definitions of masculinity from a feminist perspective are worthy additions to gender studies and also masculinity studies. This study is also a typical description of how a social movement builds and then subsides when economic support or interests wane. Finally, this study contributes to the politics of gender relations because investigating a "new masculinity" created by PK leadership and its followers is directly related to gender politics in the home and in the community. This study had shown how seven promises can shift an entire relationship and thus shift family dynamics. A new belief system of one member of a marriage invariably affects the other person. Promise Keepers has irreversibly changed many families in the United States.

AFTERWARD

At the same time PK is threatened with financial disaster, The Women of Faith organization is filling indoor arenas. This organization is often compared to Promise Keepers because of its similar global agenda: "... to assist women to encounter God and ignite the spark of women's ministry". Both groups central goal is to build strong sex segregated ministries. The women join together to hear lectures, hug, and improve their emotional health. Women of Faith organization's membership has expanded three fold since its inception 1996 and is expected to gain even more members in 1998, estimated at 350,000.¹⁵⁵ This women's group, termed an "antidote" to Promise Keepers by Nadya Labi, a Time writer, is radically different then PK in many ways. The women gather to discuss their emotional problems in a therapy-type format. They attend seminars on self esteem and parenting. The women have no comment on the issue of submission. It will be interesting to learn how they address this issue.

Like the PK movement, Women of Faith expects women to accept gender inequality. The author of the TIME article explains that this is because women's problems are seen as a *natural* part of life, "...Everyone has a tale of woe to overcome that underlies the theme of the conference: life is tough on women, but God is ever loving."¹⁵⁶ For Montana women, who head approximately 26,397 families out of 176,397 married families ¹⁵⁷ this theme is accurate. How attractive is a Christian revival, to these female household heads, which promotes dealing with life through mutual affirmation of problems instead of workable solutions. Maybe affirming their problems is a introductory step toward a vital feminist movement. As early African American

¹⁵⁵ Labi 1998:62

¹⁵⁶ Labi 1998:62

¹⁵⁷ Montana Census 1990:23

feminists, Christian women will be able to create a united ideology which can develop into a workable agenda. This agenda can act as a launching pad for political action.

Women of Faith would be an interesting group to study in the wake of Promise Keepers dwindling success. Could this organization be the beginning of a feminist Christian women's movement? Will they call for gender equality in the churches they attend? Will they have as much success demanding a new place in their families and communities as PK men seem to have had? These are questions that could be answered with further study of revitalization movements in the United States.

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